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THE CHRISTIANITY OF THE
EPISTLES

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THE CHRISTIANITY OF THE EPISTLES

BY

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"THE CHRIST OF THE GOSPELS"

"Things new and old"

NEW YORK
GEORGE H. DORAN CO.

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN
THE EDINBURGH PRESS, 9 AND 11 YOUNG STREET, EDINBURGH

PREFACE

Not long ago the distinguished President of a Canadian University, who was visiting England, expressed his surprise at the small amount of intelligent knowledge that most of the educated people he met seemed to possess of the meaning and interest of the books of the Bible. He instanced in particular the Epistles of the New Testament. There were those, he said, who "knew their Plato and their classical poets," but had almost no notion of what the Epistles were about. The explanation appeared to be, not that they had not heard and read the Epistles, but that they had never acquired the habit of considering an Epistle as a whole. They had been content to form their impressions from separate portions selected for the lectionary, or from isolated texts as these might be expounded in sermons.

In the following pages an attempt is to be made to indicate a more excellent way. Some of the principal Epistles will be taken and treated as we are accustomed to treat any other compositions that are thought to deserve serious investigation. We shall try to arrive at the standpoint of the writer, to form some idea of the situation with which he had been called upon to deal ; to learn what it was he was most anxious to impress upon

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his readers, and to form an estimate of the value of his instruction and advice for ourselves.

To prevent misapprehension, it should be understood from the outset that this is not an attempt to furnish anything like a complete analysis of the Epistles, nor to supply such a treatment of details as is to be found in the many excellent commentaries that are readily available. What is not so often to be met with is an interpretation of the leading ideas of the old documents, based upon the conviction that these, if fairly examined and clearly apprehended, will be found to be full of significance and importance for us all in the midst of the problems and questions by which we are confronted to-day.

Those who are to follow continuously the thought of these chapters will need to exercise some patience, but they may rest assured that great pains have been taken to render it as simple and intelligible as possible. The chapters were prepared for use in Study Circles ; and it is the experience that these have afforded which has encouraged the hope that what is here offered may be welcomed by some who are, perhaps anxiously, looking for help that will be of use to them in their intellectual and spiritual life.

As in previous volumes, it may again be recommended that the " Notes " should not be consulted until the chapters at the close of which they stand have been read.

THE PRECINCTS, CANTERBURY,
December 3, 1926.

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The acknowledgment of God in Christ,
Accepted by thy reason, solves for thee
All questions in the earth and out of it,
And has so far advanced thee to be wise.

BROWNING.

THE CHRISTIANITY OF THE EPISTLES

I

THE EPISTLE TO THE GALATIANS

THE CASE FOR LIBERTY

WE naturally begin with a letter from St Paul, the originator of the Christian Epistle. We shall make our start with what is now, perhaps to our surprise, increasingly accepted as the first that we have from his hand. (*Note 1.*) It is certainly entitled to a high place amongst the more characteristic of his writings.

The Epistle to the Galatians is far from being a favourite with most of us. We are apt to regard it as little more than an echo of bygone disputes, and as unlikely, therefore, to furnish the guidance which we especially require at the present time. It has to be allowed that it is not easy to get at the essential meaning of the Epistle. Possibly it is the most difficult of St Paul's writings to follow through all its details, and that is saying a good deal. None the less, perhaps all the more, the effort is worth making, and may be counted upon to bring its reward.

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Something must be said at the outset by way of historical introduction. We shall do well to get clear ideas as to the character of the people addressed, and as to the occasion that called for the letter.

We need not discuss at any length the question of the exact identification of the Galatians. It is enough to say that they were either the descendants of the Celts who had arrived in the country nearly three hundred years before ; or were part of the more mixed population belonging to the southern division of the Roman province, which had been named Galatia about the year 25 B.C., and was not fully formed until A.D. 41. The question is interesting, but not of vital importance; nor is there even yet complete agreement among scholars with regard to it.

We gather that St Paul had been suffering from severe illness at the time of his visit; but nothing, evidently, could have exceeded the warmth of the enthusiasm with which he had been received, or the "blessedness" that his converts had experienced. Yet, all too quickly, the reaction had come, with its accompanying depression and misgivings.

It was at this moment that certain would-be sympathisers had appeared on the scene, who knew well how to avail themselves of such an opportunity.

They were emissaries from the extreme section of the Jewish Church at Jerusalem. They dreaded and hated the teaching of St Paul, and had made it their business deliberately to dog his steps in the hope of neutralising his influence. They assured the Galatians that they had been cruelly misled.

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They declared that St Paul was no true Apostle; they denied his authority, and denounced his doctrines as unscriptural and dangerous. They insisted upon the value and abiding necessity of the time-honoured traditional modes and customs of religious observance, as against the pursuit of merely vague and visionary ideals. The good old ways, they maintained, were more safe and more satisfying.

It was clear that these men had obtained a favourable hearing, and were rapidly undermining the position which had been built up by the Apostle.

The tidings had filled St Paul with dismay. He knew these teachers; and he saw, as perhaps no one else then living could see, what was the real issue at stake. He was almost prepared to say that the Galatians had better have remained in their original paganism than have listened to the proposals that were made to them. Accordingly he wrote off in an anguish of alarm. Nothing could have been stronger than his protest. Under extreme pressure, in the white heat of impassioned conviction, he dispatched the Epistle. So much, then, for the circumstances and the occasion. Now we must think of the actual contents of the letter.

It was inevitable that St Paul should begin with the personal aspect. His claim to teach at all had been defiantly challenged. The reply that he made to the challenge was prompt and unhesitating. He willingly allowed that his opponents were right in affirming that he had learned his doctrines in no human school. His commission had been given

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to him directly by Christ. In this respect his position was equal to that of any of the Apostles. And the others had recognised this. As a matter of fact, he had maintained his authority, not only before, but even against an older Apostle ; and that, as he would have it remembered, in a controversy in which he had taken his stand against just such persons as were now disturbing the Churches of Galatia.

From the personal side of the matter he passed, as soon as might be, to the charges which had been brought, not against himself, but against the Gospel.

In a sense it was new, but not in the sense that it was unauthorised and unscriptural. On the contrary, it was as old as the earliest records of God's dealings with the souls of men. The controversialists had appealed to Scripture ; to the Scriptures let them go. The particular reasonings of St Paul's argument may not always be quite plain to us. It is well to remember that in all probability the line that he adopted was already in some measure familiar to the first readers of the Epistle, so that for them brief hints would suffice to awaken their memories. But even for us the general purport is not difficult to grasp.

There is the appeal to the experience of Abraham. His treatment by God is claimed as an anticipation of the method of the Gospel. (*Note 2.*) And there is the careful investigation into the meaning and intention of the Mosaic Law. This also had been anticipatory and preparatory. It had a purpose to serve, but was never intended to set aside the

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higher order of Grace. Its preparatory office could not, with advantage, be indefinitely prolonged. It was of value during the period of infancy, as a discipline for the life of sonship. But to refuse to come out of its pupilage was to forgo the very end which the Law had in view. (*Note 3.*) Such, in brief, was the Apostle's answer to the charges against the unauthorised character of himself and his teaching.

But these were not the only charges he had to meet and refute. There was another. His doctrine had been declared to be as mischievous and unsafe as it was novel and unsound. We must try to see, as far as we can, through the eyes of the objectors, in order that we may understand the full meaning of St Paul's reply.

Obviously what they most dreaded was the Apostle's proclamation and recommendation of LIBERTY. They had been led by a true instinct to recognise that. It was upon the value and necessity of liberty that he had been wont to insist. And he had made it perfectly clear what it was for him that liberty meant. In the first place, it meant *freedom from uncertainty* in the matter of the soul's standing and relation towards God. It meant that doubt and misgiving, and all unworthy fears, were to be replaced by faith and assurance and whole-hearted confidence, as the result of the full realisation of sonship through and in Christ.

And further, it meant *freedom from* the fruitlessness of all *self-originated* effort. The old reliance upon activities of the conscience and the will, which needed to be perpetually goaded and stimu-

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lated by fear or ambition, was to be entirely renounced. "Works" were to be abandoned for dependence upon Grace and the power of new life within.

To the Judaisers all this seemed most dangerous. In their view these spiritual uncertainties and unremitting labours were indispensable safeguards of morality, and the only security for ultimate safety. To tell men that they ought, from the very outset of their religious career, to rejoice in the certainty of full acceptance by God, and to rely for their progress upon a power that was not their own, was perilous in the extreme.

They were for the timid course; he was for the bold. They were for making the most of the old nature; he was for depending upon the growth of the new. The issue was plain, and there could be no compromise. But how was it to be shown where exactly they were wrong?

St Paul begins with a line of argument that may seem to us rather fanciful, but which would have been quite natural and effective for those who had been impressed by the Judaisers. By their training in the Rabbinic schools these teachers had been accustomed to look for allegories in the Old Testament. He, too, will supply the Galatians with such an allegory, and will give the interpretation of it.

Let them turn to the old record, and they would see that Abraham long ago had two kinds of offspring; the one the children of a bondwoman, the other the children of the free. And "what saith the Scripture?" The answer was plain beyond a

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doubt. "Cast out the bondwoman and her son." Let them, therefore, follow the old precedent and chase away these descendants of Hagar, who had presumed to disturb their peace.

Whatever we may think of this interpretation of the history, we must do justice to the courage, and more than courage, of the expositor who employed it. It has been truly said that "It is scarcely possible to estimate the strength of conviction and depth of prophetic insight which this declaration implies." (*Note 4.*)

But, while we may agree as to this, and may admit the force of St Paul's argument for those who originally heard it, we know enough of the Apostle to be sure that he would not be content with a rhetorical *tour de force*. His purpose was not merely to secure a controversial victory over opponents, but to help those who were honestly perplexed to a real understanding of the truth.

It is most interesting and important to see how he does this. He puts his finger on what has always been the main source of the errors that have arisen in regard to the nature and effects of liberty. The mistake has been the failure to distinguish between liberty and something which, though superficially like, is in reality radically opposed to it. He will show them in what the difference consists; and, when they have learned that, they will know what it is they really have cause to be afraid of.

Nothing could be clearer than his treatment of the subject. "Ye, brethren, were called for freedom; only use not your freedom for an occasion to

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the flesh." In other words, liberty is one thing, and licence is another. Liberty is of the spirit ; licence of the flesh.

What that means in practice, he shows them by drawing his famous contrast between the "works of the flesh" and "the fruit of the spirit."

To begin with, he gives them the horrid category of evil products—"works"—which result from the unrestrained activities of unregenerate natural desires. Then follows the wonderful exhibition of the "fruit" which is to be looked for when the higher elements of the life are freely surrendered to the unhindered influences of good.

It was this manifestation of life at its very best that St Paul proposed to the Galatians as the most convincing answer to their hesitations and fears. Let us think for a moment or two what it is.

"The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance."

We cannot overestimate the worth of this description. The more closely we examine it, the more we become aware of its accuracy and beauty.

By far the best commentary upon it is to be found in our Lord's farewell conversations with His disciples, as recorded in the later chapters of the Fourth Gospel. In these discourses He is seeking to convey to them some conception of the real nature of the life which He had been living, and they in their measure were to live as His followers. It is more than interesting to note that

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He gives the first place to "My love," "My joy," and "My peace"; naming the qualities in that order (see St John xiv. 31; xv. 11; xvi. 33).

Can we doubt that He intended, when He used these words, to give a description of the kind of life that He on earth had lived with His Father in heaven?

"Love, Joy, Peace," are not these the qualities that make the atmosphere of home? And is it not true that the Christian Gospel is before all else an invitation to find the fulfilment of human nature's deepest needs in Him who is "our Eternal Home"? It is in Him alone that the soul can know the meaning of absolute confidence, complete satisfaction, and utter repose.

Well, indeed, would it be for us if we could settle it in our minds that all true character has its beginnings in communion with the Divine. Time given to spiritual devotion and meditation is not lost. Outward living is only the revealing of inward life. There is no exaggeration in saying that "when a man lives with God, his voice shall be as sweet as the murmur of the brook and the rustle of the corn." (*Note 5.*)

It was, therefore, by a true sequence that St Paul went on to describe the kind of behaviour that is to be looked for from the Christian who is living this heavenly life amid the calls and trials of earthly existence.

Here, again, we shall find the best clue to his meaning if we recall the words in which our Lord warned His disciples that they must be prepared to encounter in the world conditions that would be

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the very opposite of those of which He had been speaking. Instead of "love," they must expect to find hate. Instead of "joy," there would be sorrow. Instead of "peace," He said, "In the world ye shall have tribulation."

What then is the character that will correspond aright to the demand of such an environment? Could any account tell us better than that which was given by St Paul?

Without doubt there will be need for "long-suffering," the patient endurance of unkindness and injury; and there should be "gentleness," which implies the absence of any trace of bitterness or scorn; and "goodness," which will let no opportunity pass of conferring benefit or rendering service; and, once more, "faith," an unconquerable belief in the goodness, or at least the possibility of goodness, in others; the very opposite of cynical suspicion and mistrust. (*Note 6.*) It is scarcely necessary to point out that these are just the qualities that the world is most quick to remark as those which distinguish, and ought to distinguish, the specifically Christian type of character.

We might not have thought it possible to add anything to give completeness to the picture. But there is more to be said, and St Paul did not fail to say it. There is still the relation of the life, not only to God and to society, but to itself. Two words give us all that can be needed: "meekness," which is the proper estimate of the place that self ought to occupy; and "temperance," or self-control, which is the resolute determination to keep self in its place. A moment's reflection will con-

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vince us that these are marks that must be found in those who are to bear the likeness of Him who was beyond all else our pattern in this, that He was "meek and lowly in heart."

"Goodness," it has been finely said, "is admired and taught in all religions. But to be good, and to know that your goodness is as nothing, to ripen all excellence—and, like corn, to bend the head when full of ripe and bursting grain—that is Christianity." (*Note 7.*) "The fruit of the spirit" is not fully ripe until to all its other excellences there has been added the delicate bloom of a genuine humility.

Surely we may search the whole of literature and not find a portraiture of character more true and more beautiful than this. The Epistle to the Galatians would have made us its debtors for ever if it had done no more than supply us with such a sketch of the ideal of a life that is fully responsive to the outreaching and inworking of the Divine.

We need not wonder that St Paul should have felt that no further defence was necessary. We can almost see the smile on his face as he remarked, not without a touch of irony, "against such there is no law"! Things like these obviously do not invite the interference of legislation. And these things are at once the outcome and the justification of Liberty.

Not much was wanted to complete the Epistle. There are one or two practical counsels emphasising the duties of considerateness and generosity; and a postscript in which the Apostle once more threw

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down the gage of battle to his assailants, while invoking peace and mercy upon the true servants of God. So ends a writing of which it is only the simple truth to say that "it marks an epoch in the history of man; it is the ever-precious document of his spiritual emancipation." (*Note 8.*)

That the effect of the Epistle was all that could be wished for at the time and afterwards we can have no doubt. It is true that St Paul's position as a whole was only imperfectly apprehended in the subapostolic age. It is the more remarkable, therefore, that this part of his teaching should have been accepted as unchallengeable. Had it been otherwise, Ignatius could scarcely have written as he did: "If we live after the manner of Judaism, we avow that we have not received grace." (*Note 9.*) It was the rediscovery of this Epistle—the term is not too strong—in the sixteenth century that was the source of what was best in the demand for liberty that was then made on the Continent and in our country.

The belief in liberty has been strengthening ever since. To-day we watch its influence growing, in national and social, as well as in educational, spheres. No doubt there is still a disposition in some quarters to muffle its trumpet-note; but we may be certain that no nation, no church, and indeed no individual, can remain for long in a healthy state in which that note is unheard and unheeded.

St Paul, if he were here, would tell us that we ought never to be afraid of liberty; but he would warn us to see to it that liberty is not degraded by being confounded with licence.

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NOTES

1. "Gal. i. and ii. were written before the Council at Jerusalem." "The visit to Jerusalem described in Gal. ii. 1-10, corresponds to Acts xi. 30, and not to Acts xv."

"The letter was written probably when St Paul was actually on his way to Jerusalem, to encourage the Pisidian and Laodicean converts to stand firm, whatever the Jewish-Christian conservatives might demand from them as of right."—Prof. Burkitt, *Christian Beginnings*, pp. 116 f.

Similarly, Prof. Cuthbert Turner, in his Inaugural Lecture at Oxford (1920), maintained that the Epistle was written in A.D. 49, before the Apostolic Conference at Jerusalem, and was, therefore, the first of the Pauline Epistles.

2. How great a weight would attach to any inference drawn from the example of Abraham may be realised if it is remembered with what exaggerated reverence his person and influence were regarded by the Rabbinical authorities.

For his sake, they said, Moses had been allowed to ascend into heaven, and to receive the Law. For his sake the sin of the golden calf had been forgiven; and Daniel had been heard. The very ships on the sea were preserved through his merit; and the rain descended on account of it!—See Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, i. p. 271.

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3. "In the whole range of literature there is no more brilliant piece of true historic insight than St Paul's view of Judaism as a mere parenthesis in history."—Prof. Gwatkin, *Knowledge of God*, ii. p. 56.
4. Bishop Lightfoot, *Galatians* (*in loc.*).
5. Emerson.
6. It is clear that "faith" in this passage cannot be taken to mean faith towards God. That, in St Paul's teaching, held a different place in spiritual development. It belonged to its root and not to its fruit. Of the possible alternative interpretations it seems most satisfactory to choose trust, belief, reliance, as shown towards men, rather than faithfulness or fidelity.

No one would question that faith in human nature is an unfailing mark of the truest goodness, a sure sign of

"Simple, noble natures, credulous
Of what they long for, good in friend or foe,
And most in those who most have done them ill."
TENNYSON, *Geraint and Enid*.
7. F. W. Robertson.
8. Godet.
9. Ignatius, Ep. to *Magnesians*, 8.

II

THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS

JUSTIFICATION AND RECONCILIATION

IN the Epistle to the Galatians St Paul had made his memorable defence of Christian Liberty, boldly maintaining that it is an indispensable condition of attainment to the truest ideal of life. We can well believe that he would desire to expound his Gospel yet more fully, and in a less contentious atmosphere; with the deliberation and completeness that its adequate handling required.

The opportunity was not long in coming. There was a church he had hoped to visit. It was well worth helping and establishing, for it held a predominant position, situated as it was in the Metropolis of the Empire. He had heard encouraging reports of it from his friends Aquila and Priscilla. He could not pay his visit at once, for he felt bound to return to Jerusalem. Indeed, he might never be able to pay it.

At all events he will write, and so discharge a part of his debt as an Apostle. May it not have been, also, that he welcomed the gain that would come to himself as his own thoughts were made clearer in the very act of expression?

The Epistle to the Romans is a difficult Epistle.

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The difficulty is due to its fulness of thought, and to the fact that many of its expressions and illustrations were adapted to conditions widely differing from our own. We must make sure that we understand what it was that St Paul was so keen about; and then try to see what light he had to shed upon needs and problems that were never more insistent than they are amongst ourselves to-day.

We may say with confidence that when he was writing this Epistle St Paul felt constrained to give utterance to two convictions, and these the central convictions of his life.

The first was the conviction that it is the will of God that the souls of men should possess a conscious assurance of His approbation and favour.

It is of great importance to emphasise that word, Approbation. For a long time we have been familiar with teaching which has laid stress upon the goodness, that is to say the beneficence, of God. It has been taken for granted that nothing can be so necessary to our well-being as a grateful recognition of this.

But here it is possible to go seriously wrong. The human heart needs more. It needs the knowledge of a loving-kindness that is not only general, but particular, personal and intimate; and, in the strictest sense of the word, peculiar.

For this, men's souls have yearned in all ages, and in all religions; as is testified by the unceasing prayers that have been offered, and the innumerable sacrifices that have been made to attain it. Until it has been attained, the heart and conscience of man are, and must be, "restless ever."

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That is a truth which we greatly need to have revived amongst us. A generation or so ago it was much more insisted upon than it is at present; and there can be no doubt that the absence of this conviction is a source of much weakness.

"It is hard to believe," wrote Dr Arnold of Rugby, "that our single individual soul is, and ever has been, the direct object of the infinite Love of the most high God. Yet this we are warranted, nay, commanded to believe; and if this truth ever takes possession of our hearts, then we are redeemed indeed." (*Note 1.*)

That statement would have been heartily endorsed by St Paul; and, as a matter of fact, his writings have always been the chief source from which such teaching has been derived.

St Paul knew, as few have known, the deep craving of the heart for a sense of right relationship with God. None had ever sought it more earnestly; and it was because the need had been satisfied for him that he held himself infinitely bound to make known to all men the way in which alone it can be met. In this Epistle he sets out with the greatest care what he believed he had been commissioned to tell of the matter.

Before all else he was certain that the great boon can only come directly from God Himself, and must be accepted as a free gift. This, he claims, is sufficiently proved by the fact of man's universal failure to obtain it by any endeavours of his own.

The pagan world had failed, as judged by its own standards. He shows this by a rapid glance into

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the appalling depths of depravity into which it had fallen in its increasing alienation from all that was holy and just. And the Jew was no better off. His guilt had, if possible, been deeper, inasmuch as he had sinned against greater opportunities, and had presumed to seek for refuge in the blindness of his own conceit.

So it had been made evident upon the widest scale that the blessing of Righteousness could not be won by any efforts man was likely to make, or was capable of making. But did that mean that the resources of the Divine mercy were exhausted? On the contrary, man's necessity is ever God's opportunity. Accordingly the Divine grace had been abundantly displayed. Help had intervened, with the greatest patience and at infinite cost. A Saviour had appeared to act for both God and man. He had died for our sins, and had risen again for our JUSTIFICATION.

Here we have the classic word of the great argument of St Paul. It is a word round which some of the fiercest theological battles have been waged. The main point at issue can be easily stated. Does the phrase "to justify" mean to make righteous? or does it mean to account and treat as righteous one who is not yet actually righteous?

Happily we can say that modern scholarship is in no uncertainty as to the answer that has to be given. Volumes of discussion have been closed by the recognition of the simple fact that, whatever may be the case with the Latin and English renderings, the Greek word *dikaion* "cannot mean to make righteous." (*Note 2.*) Apart from that fact, it

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might have been thought that St Paul had made his meaning sufficiently clear when he used such expressions as "the gift of righteousness," and "justified the ungodly."

"The specially Pauline feature in the conception," it has been truly said, "is that the declaration of righteousness on the part of God, the Divine verdict of acquittal, runs in advance of the actual practice of righteousness, and comes forth at once on the sincere embracing of Christianity." (*Note 2.*)

Let us not doubt, then, that what St Paul meant to affirm was that any man who, in utter renunciation of his own merit, dares to claim the privilege of his Baptism into, and faith in, Christ has the right to be sure that he is invested with a righteousness far better than any of his own, and is favourably accepted in the sight of God on that account only.

Justification is much more than forgiveness. Forgiveness, it has been well said, means "you can go"; Justification means "you may come." The one is dismissal, as from a prison; the other is the welcome to the honours and familiarities of a home. The essential thing to remember is that the blessing must be accepted humbly as an act of free grace, and is never to be thought of as the uncertain goal of meritorious endeavour. As Bishop Gore, following in the steps of St Augustine, has put it: God accepts men and treats them "by anticipation"; in view, that is to say, of what they are becoming rather than of what they already are.

St Paul would not have thought the words of Richard Hooker unduly audacious: "Just are we in the sight of God the Father, as the very Son of

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God Himself. Let it be counted folly or frenzy or whatsoever. It is our wisdom and our comfort; we care for no knowledge in the world but this, that God hath made Himself the sin of man, and that men are made the righteousness of God." (*Note 3.*)

We cannot be surprised that this teaching of St Paul should have had to encounter all sorts of objections. Professor Burkitt, in his *Christian Beginnings*, has remarked that the Epistles "still sound in parts rather dangerous, and must have sounded flamingly dangerous to the Believers in Jerusalem." These believers, no doubt, had their representatives at Rome; and the Apostle would have had no difficulty in foreseeing the line they were likely to take. We cannot attempt to follow him through all the details of his defence. It must be enough if we endeavour to recall the main trend of his argument.

As before, in writing to the Galatians, so now again he was anxious to show that there was the best authority for the doctrine that God can accept man apart from the fulfilment of the demands of the Mosaic Law. Again he made his appeal to the experience of Abraham, and to the great text in Habakkuk.

And again he took up, this time more deliberately, the challenge as to practical consequences. It was certain to be urged that teaching such as his would tend to produce exaggerated self-importance and conceit. What security was there that it would not lead to carelessness, even recklessness, of living? Must it not encourage and multiply sins?

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St Paul had no thought of shirking these aspersions and insinuations. He meets them and replies to them point by point.

Everything depended upon a right understanding of the new relationship which is revealed to, and accepted by, faith.

Individual self-centredness was impossible for those who knew that all they possessed was only theirs as parts in a whole of which Christ was the Head.

Pride could have no place where there was no room for self-congratulation.

Newness of life became a reality to all who yielded themselves to the recreating influence of the Love of God.

Grace was more powerful than Law, inasmuch as grace not only prohibited, but actually annihilated, sin. In very truth it was the one and only power that could do this.

There was no reason, therefore, to be afraid of the practical outcome. All that was good must follow. A life of holiness would be an inevitable result. "For if ye live after the flesh, ye must die; but if by the spirit ye mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live."

Never was appeal more confidently urged: "Being therefore justified by faith, let us have peace with God." The Apostle felt no sort of uncertainty, and his arguments have been strengthened and sustained ever since by the experiences of innumerable lives.

And yet, amply sufficient as we may feel St

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Paul's defence to have been as against the objections he had then to encounter, we cannot ignore the fact that his teaching is not regarded as free from other difficulties which are very serious for the modern mind. What, for instance, are we to say when it is asked, "Is not this doctrine of justification, with its assertion of imputed righteousness, based after all upon a fiction?" Or to put the objection less offensively, is not the metaphor upon which the teaching depends merely forensic; intelligible, no doubt, to Roman readers who were familiar with their own legal procedure, but scarcely convincing to ourselves?

At first hearing there seems a good deal to be said for the misgiving thus expressed, and certainly nothing is to be gained by making light of it. But there are considerations which go to show that we need not be greatly disturbed by such criticisms.

It has to be remembered that St Paul's language and thought were not such as could only be appreciated by the Latin mind. They owed much of their form and quality to the Greek idealism which was so congenial to his temperament, and so useful in commending his message to the intellect of Europe.

And, if this was true in the Apostle's lifetime, it is not less true to-day. It would be possible to name several able thinkers of the last half-century, by no means all of them professed theologians, who have acknowledged that they knew of no better language than that of St Paul in which to express some of the ripest conceptions of philosophy and religion.

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To take one such example, which is for many reasons specially interesting and significant. There lately passed from us a thinker who for many years had held high rank as a logician and metaphysician, and who was acknowledged by all who knew him to be as sincere as he was acute. Among the latest of his writings was a little book which bears the engaging title, *What Religion Is*. In it he gave us a final statement of his convictions on the highest of all subjects.

In reporting his views we are bound to be most cautious, lest we should read into his language more than he meant it to contain. Happily he was the master of a singularly lucid style, and in this particular instance he seems to have been at pains to leave no doubt as to his meaning. Indeed, it is not necessary to go beyond the opening chapter to find the clue to all that was to follow. The heading he gave it was this: "The Peace of God. Salvation. Justification." What he meant by these terms he most carefully explained.

The following quotations may be taken as fairly describing the experience to which he was referring :

"Something has happened. We were not safe, but now we are. . . . We are at home in the Universe; and, in principle and in the main, timid and feeble creatures as we are, there is nothing anywhere within the world or without it that can make us afraid."

"We are saved, if we must have a word, from isolation; we are saved by giving ourselves to something which we cannot help holding supreme."

"There is a traditional phrase intended to sum

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up the whole point and meaning of religion; and it utters all these characteristics we have insisted upon quite simply and plainly. It is the old expression, 'Justification by Faith.'"

"We cannot be 'saved' as we are; we cannot cease to be what we are; we can only be saved by giving ourselves to something in which we remain what we are, and yet enter upon something new. The peculiar attitude in which this is effected is religious faith."

"Faith is contrasted with sight because it is essential to it that we rise into another world while remaining here."

"This is why religion justifies the religious man. It does not abolish his finiteness, his weakness and his sin. But what it does is to make him deny that they are real."

"Nobody is anything except as he gives himself to something."

"You cannot be a whole unless you join a whole."

"This I believe is religion." "Here is peace, victory, salvation. If your creed effectually gives you this, you have all you want." (*Note 4.*)

St Paul, we may be sure, would have been rejoiced by this utterance; and we have a right to gather from such language from such a source that we need have no fear that the Apostle's words and teaching are hopelessly out of date. On the contrary, it may be more reasonably supposed that they are only now about to receive their complete interpretation.

We must pass from St Paul's first object in

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writing to speak of his second. We might perhaps wonder what other conviction he could judge to be of anything like equal importance and urgency. And yet, if we have a real knowledge of his mind and history, we shall not be greatly surprised when we learn what this further conviction was.

It was the confident persuasion that the Divine Love is not to be limited to a few recipients; but that it needs for its satisfaction, and for the fulfilment of its vast designs, the united co-operation of mankind, with all that the various races and classes have it in their power to contribute.

It was this certainty that made St Paul the ardent Churchman he was. If the thought of the individual and his need came first with him, it could not stand alone. He cared much for the individual because he cared even more for the whole. His passionate desire was to prepare the way of the future by gathering together the scattered members of the Universal Society which was to be at once the pledge and the instrument of the upbuilding of the humanity that is to be.

For practical purposes this meant that the "next thing" to be aimed at in the great programme was the reconciliation in one Community of the conflicting elements of Jew and of Gentile. To accomplish this, "for the Body's sake," made pains and sacrifices seem as nothing to him. Difficulties there were, and often they might appear to be insuperable; but he could meet them gladly and with a good courage, since he was fully persuaded as to what was the will of God.

But there was one difficulty that he had himself

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acutely felt; and he knew it to be a cause of painful perplexity to others.

It was bound to arise whenever any serious attempt was made to interpret the meaning of the providential ordering of history. Then some such question as this could not be avoided. Does the past history of the religious training of the race really suggest that the Divine purpose of good is intended, not for some only, but for all? Can it be said, for example, that it is consistent with any such large intention that Israel should, to all appearance, be rejected and set aside, while the Gentiles are invited to inherit the privileges of the Gospel? To express this difficulty by one word, it is the agelong problem of Predestination.

That, then, is the question with which St Paul felt that he must specially deal in the latter part of his Epistle. Three chapters are occupied with its discussion. The matter had evidently cost him much anxious and earnest thought. But he is clear as to what were the main conclusions at which he had arrived. If the lines of his argument are carefully followed they will be found to include all that is most needed for a working solution of the mystery. It is not too much to say that in them he drew the first outlines of a Christian philosophy of history.

In the first place, St Paul felt it necessary to insist that a restraint has to be set upon the exercise of irresponsible criticism. Allowance has to be made for the probability that the potter knows what he is about in fashioning the clay. But this is not to say that, because we cannot understand all, we can

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therefore understand nothing. There is much that we can and ought to understand.

He would have his readers remember that Israel was the rejecter before it was the rejected. The call had been given, and had been persistently refused. Nor was it to be forgotten that the withdrawal of Israel had served in a remarkable way to make possible the admission of the Gentiles. For that reason, if for no other, it behoved the Gentiles to think with modesty of their gain, and of the price that had been paid for it. This was the more necessary because they might be certain that, sooner or later, the situation would undergo a great change. The fact that they were so well off would of itself act as an incentive to those who had forfeited for a time what really belonged to them; and then they could be the more readily reinstated, because the right to the position had been originally theirs.

That such a return was yet to take place, St Paul had no doubt. It was not possible to think that a temporary miscarriage could be allowed to frustrate the Divine design. In the end God's forbearance will be vindicated, for His glory, and for the enrichment of mankind. Language could not be more confident than that in which the Apostle expressed the largeness of his hope, and the wonder to which he was stirred by the thought of the loving wisdom which is to bring about its accomplishment.

"So *all* Israel shall be saved." "That he might have mercy upon *all*." "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God."

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“For of him, and through him, and unto him are *all* things.”

The end might still be very far off; and particular details might be far from clear. The Apostle was content to leave them in Higher Hands, assured as he was that all would be well.

Not that he imagined for a moment that there was no need for effort, or that Christian men and women had not their appointed parts to play. If the good and perfect will of God was to be done, there must be those who would do it. There is work for all if the great reconciliation is to become a reality. Accordingly St Paul proceeds to give practical counsels as to the duties of corporate living, laying special stress upon the need of tolerance and mutual consideration; and not omitting to call attention to the necessity of a proper submission to the secular authorities, for the neglect of which the Jews of Rome had been too often notorious. “Let us follow after things that make for peace.”

Before he concludes with personal greetings, another note had to be sounded which would appeal to the sympathies of his readers. The Apostle told of his own plans and labours; and more particularly of the difficult task he had undertaken of conveying the alms of the Gentiles to the Church at Jerusalem. That was a work of much delicacy and some danger; but very important, since, as he hoped, it might contribute to the forwarding of the great cause of unity.

So ends this masterly exposition of the two chief

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elements of the teaching of the Gospel—Peace with God, and goodwill amongst men.

Many attempts have been made to appraise the value and influence of the work. Dr Farrar, in his characteristically enthusiastic way, declared that "Phoebe, the humble deaconess of Cenchrea, when she conveyed this letter to Rome, was carrying under her robe the whole future of Christian theology." (*Note 5.*)

Coleridge, who was no incompetent judge in such a matter, gave it as his opinion that the Epistle to the Romans is "the profoundest work of man."

The writers of the best critical commentary we have on the Epistle were certainly guilty of no exaggeration when they said: "It is one of the most original of writings. No Christian can have read it for the first time without feeling that he was introduced to thoughts and depths of Christianity of which he had never been conscious before."

"The whole is a great argument, the purpose of which is to explain the Gospel of God in Jesus the Messiah, and to show its effects on human life, and in the history of the race, and thus to vindicate for it the right to be considered the ultimate and final revelation of God's purpose for mankind." (*Note 6.*)

NOTES

1. Dr Arnold, *The Christian Life, its Hopes, Fears, and Close*, p. 329. A striking testimony to the change referred to was given by Dr Dale, of Birmingham. He wrote as follows:

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“Christian people used to believe that God has a special love for those who love Christ and keep His commandments. They used to believe it with all their hearts. When I was a boy, the Christian people among whom I lived believed it more or less, though even then the belief was beginning to wither, and very much of the beauty and the glory had gone out of it.”—*The Evangelical Revival*, pp. 202 f.

2. Sanday and Headlam, *Romans*, p. 30.
3. Hooker's *Sermons*, ii. p. 6.
4. Dr Bernard Bosanquet, 1920.
5. Farrar, *Messages of the Books*, p. 275.
6. Sanday and Headlam, *Romans*, pp. xli, li.

III

THE EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS

THE INCREASING PURPOSE

WE know this Epistle by its familiar title, but the view now generally adopted is that it was originally intended not for a particular church only, but for a circle of churches, of which Ephesus was the chief. (*Note 1.*)

There were special reasons why these churches should be addressed, and with more than usual care. Under the Divine guidance, St Paul's mind had been continually growing, and by degrees there had come to him a "wisdom" which he longed to share with any who might be ready to receive it.

That being so, he might well have desired to entrust it in a carefully considered form to some Christian communities that had reached the sufficiently advanced stage of discipleship. Not unnaturally his thoughts turned to the province of Asia, in which he had himself done much work and spent a long time.

Apart from the fact of his personal connexion, there were considerations that would have inclined him to look in this direction to find the disciplined understanding that was needed to grasp and appreciate the teaching he was anxious to convey.

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There is an interesting passage at the beginning of St Chrysostom's commentary on the Epistle which laid stress on this point. "The majority of the most eminent philosophers," he wrote, "lived in the Province of Asia; for Pythagoras is said to have come from thence, and afterwards the whole Ionic school, Parmenides and Zeno and Democritus; and you will find a number of philosophers there even at the present day.

"These facts I mention, not merely as such, but with a view to showing that Paul would need to take great pains and trouble in writing to these Ephesians. He is said indeed to have entrusted them, as being persons already well-instructed, with his profoundest conceptions; and the Epistle itself is full of sublime conceptions and doctrines."

It is worth while to remember that it was to the same quarter that the aged St John turned at a later date, when he was seeking to gather about him the spiritual children to whose keeping he might commit the sacred tradition of the things he had seen and known.

In the Christians of Ephesus and its neighbourhood, then, St Paul evidently believed that he might find the community which could best be made the depository of his deepest thoughts.

We may approach the Epistle, therefore, with more than common expectation. Like some other writings that have profoundly stirred men's souls, it was composed in captivity. Carlyle protested that, in circumstances such as Bunyan's, he too could have written a book which could not otherwise have been got out of him. It may have been

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so with St Paul. Certain it is that, while his body was guarded, his spirit was free to range and soar as it would. He had suffered much for the largeness and boldness of his thoughts about God's dealings with man. In his prison hours these thoughts became larger and bolder than ever.

Things had been shown to him which were hidden from the generations before him. And he had been pledged to no secrecy.

On the contrary, he had been bidden to communicate what he had seen and heard in order that he might, if possible, "make all men see what is the dispensation of the mystery which from all ages hath been hid in God who created all things." (*Note 2.*)

The Purpose of God for the world—"the mystery of his will"—it was a bold thing to undertake to explain this. And that is what St Paul did claim to do.

If such a claim were made by an ordinary teacher, we should perhaps be sceptical as to the result. We might expect that, sooner or later, this would be found to resolve itself into a vague rhetoric which left us very much where we were.

But St Paul was far from being an ordinary teacher. His Epistle is full of ardent and impetuous passion. It is a treatise primarily addressed to the soul; and it is only when the words kindle in those who read them something of their author's enthusiasm, and when they are able to share in some measure the width of his outlook, that they can hope to see as he saw. But we shall make a great mistake if we imagine that there is any lack of in-

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tellectual lucidity in what he has written. To use his own words, we can perceive as we read his "understanding in the mystery."

What, then, is it that he tells us?

To begin with, he sets before us that which we naturally desire to know first—the *goal*, the end; "the one far-off Divine event to which the whole creation moves." What is this? We have the answer in his wonderful opening sentence:

"He hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself, that in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together all things . . . both which are in heaven and which are on earth."

The expression "gather together" (or "sum up"), as it stands in the original, is a remarkable one. What it suggests is a synthesis, an ultimate reintegration, of the now disjointed and distracted elements of creation in a final reconciliation of harmony and peace. (*Note 3.*)

Words could not be bolder. We have no right to add to them; that we could scarcely do. And we may not diminish aught from them. That, in our timidity and in our perplexity, on account of seeming disagreement with other words to us equally sacred, we may be sorely tempted to do.

For a knowledge of the precise nature and exact circumstances of the appointed end, we must be patient and wait. Our capacities for such knowledge are as yet very imperfectly developed. "God is His own interpreter, and He will make it plain."

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All we really need is "light enough to go by." If the vision of the goal is to be more to us than a splendid guess, a beautiful dream, we need to be shown something definitely of the course, the process, which is to lead to the end. We must know not only whither the creation is going, we must also know *the way*. In other words, what is of practical importance is that we should be told something as to what is to be looked for in the middle distance, the intermediate stage.

Can St Paul tell us this? Most assuredly he can. It is this that he is especially concerned to explain. Let us see how he does it.

Speaking generally, he says that the accomplishment of the Purpose has been entrusted to Christ, the incarnate, exalted, ever-living Christ. It is the Divine intention to "gather together all things in Christ," "according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The world was out of joint, and Christ came to set it right. The work could not be done without the utmost sacrifice and cost. A pagan might imagine that for the gods all designs were to be accomplished without toil. But our Christian poet spoke more truly when he wrote:

"It is by no breath,
Turn of eye, wave of hand, that salvation
joins issue with death!
He who did most shall bear most: the strongest
shall stand the most weak." (*Note 4.*)

As St Paul puts it with unmistakable clearness:
"We have our redemption through his blood . . .

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through the cross." The evidence that the triumph had been won was seen, and the seal of God's approval was given, when "he raised him from the dead, and made him to sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come."

Having said so much generally in regard to the Divine method, St Paul goes on to explain the particular way in which the power of the exalted Christ is being made operative in the world. Only by degrees could final redemption be attained. A beginning must be made, on a limited scale, with a chosen few. Hence it was that He "gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him who all in all is being fulfilled." (*Note 5.*)

The appointed task of the intermediate stage is the calling and the perfecting of the Church. St Paul has marvellous things to relate as to the privileges and prospects of its members.

He was most eager that his readers should rise to a full apprehension of these. What he meant was well expressed by the eloquent Chrysostom when expounding his Epistle:

"Look whither He hath raised the Church. He hath raised it up to a vast height and set it on yonder throne; for where the Head is, there is the body also. And, if they are Head and body, there is no interval to separate between them."

"If anyone had placed a diadem about our head,

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a crown of gold, should we not do everything we could that we might seem worthy of the lifeless jewels. But now it is not a diadem that is placed about our head, but, what is far greater, Christ is made our very Head; and pay we no regard to it? Yet angels reverence that Head, and archangels, and all the powers above."

But, while St Paul was keen to impress upon his readers the surpassing glory of their position and its blessings, he would not have them imagine that these were to be accepted and prized as an end in themselves.

For St Paul the care bestowed upon the Church was only the means whereby a much larger result was to be attained. That was what made the service of the Church so supremely worth while. The Church was not the goal, but a step towards the goal, something that had to be completed before the end could be reached.

It was "through the church" that there was to be revealed "the manifold wisdom of God according to the eternal purpose."

This is an aspect of St Paul's teaching which ought to appeal to our age as it has perhaps never appealed before. We are especially sensitive in regard to monopoly and privilege, and are, indeed, intolerant of such things unless it can be shown that they can be interpreted in terms of trusteeship and service. Given these conditions, we can see that what otherwise might be exclusive and unjust may be accepted as useful, and even as indispensable. (*Note 6.*)

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It cannot be said too clearly that the Divine plan is that of working from a centre, and beginning with the few. Christ is yet to be manifested as the head of a restored humanity. Meanwhile a society, a body of Christ, is being prepared as a first-fruit. It is to consist of representatives drawn from the entire race; "till we all come . . . unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of the Christ." (*Note 7.*)

The present is the dispensation of election, and not of "the fulness of times." The Church is in the making, and the end is not yet. Our prayer should be that God will "quickly accomplish the number of his elect, and hasten his kingdom."

It was the hope of this consummation that animated St Paul, and was the motive which inspired him. His untiring endeavours were made "for the body's sake"; and his ambition was to bring into its growing organism the elements which were needed for its health and well-being.

For most of us slowness of any kind is unwelcome. We are "idolaters of the immediate." We are little men and we are in a hurry. God is great and He is in no hurry. We have to learn that the "purpose of the ages" is not to be accomplished within a term of days and years.

So far then St Paul has told two things. He has told us of the Goal; and he has told us of the Method which is being employed to reach it. Is there anything more that we can reasonably desire to know? There is. We might not have been

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bold enough to put the request into words; but we can see the need, more especially in times of difficulty and anxious reflection, when progress is uncertain and workers are exhausted by the strain of much conflict and toil. At such moments how good it would be if a Pledge might be given to convince and sustain, some security which would remove all possibility of doubt that what has been promised will really come true.

It is a matter for deep thankfulness that St Paul has anticipated the expression of this need. He was conscious that his message would not have been complete without some such further assurance. And he can tell of its provision.

"Ye were sealed," he is able to say, "with that holy spirit of promise, which is an earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession."

By the gift of the Spirit the members of the Christian Society had received a stamp, an impress, a character, which marked them out as destined for the greatest things; and had been endowed with an instalment, a foretaste, of the much more that is in store. (*Note 8.*)

No conviction of St Paul was stronger than this, that a new life force had appeared within the fellowship of the Church. It had come from the living Head as a permanent gift to all who would accept and employ it. This was the power of the Spirit, sent to strengthen the hearts and to illuminate the consciences and minds of Christians. Unmistakably not of this world, it was the evidence and pledge of their heavenly heritage.

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From St Paul, more than from any other New Testament writer, we derive instruction as to the workings of the Spirit in Christian experience. (*Note 9.*)

And nowhere did he dwell with such confidence and delight upon their abundance and variety as in this Epistle. What he tells would supply the subject-matter for a treatise in itself. We have only to follow his statements in the order in which he made them, to learn that the Holy Spirit is the author of Light, and Life, and Love; of Purity, and Gladness, and Order; and, as if to complete the sevenfold enumeration, that it is only by His aid that Christian soldiers can win the Victory in their struggles with the evil powers. We can well believe that things would soon be different in the world if Christians were filled with the determination to make use of all this spiritual wealth which might be theirs for the claiming.

Here we might end, but that if we did so we should be doing less than full justice to the Epistle and its writer. St Paul was before everything else an idealist; but he was also one of the most convincing examples of the fact that the idealist may be also the most practical of men. For him the loftiest conceptions were naturally and inseparably linked with the homeliest duties.

Burke said of King Alfred that he "comprehended in the greatness of his mind the whole of government and all its parts at once; and, which is

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most difficult to human frailty, was at the same time sublime and minute."

That might have been written as a description of St Paul. He could be at one and the same time sublime and minute. He could soar, as we have seen, beyond the reach of the most enthusiastic visionary, comprehending in his view the principles of the government, not only of a kingdom, but of a world and of the universe; and he could come down immediately and without difficulty to the smallest particulars of daily life and ordinary business.

He sets out with fulness the relations in which the various members of the Body should stand to each other; the necessity for truth in conversation, the limits of indignation, the motives for industry, the importance of sobriety, the value of music, the rules that should govern the nursery; not overlooking the respective responsibilities of masters and servants. They are all considered and discussed; indeed nothing of importance would seem to have been omitted from this spiritual masterpiece. (*Note 10.*)

We may well say of it, as did Coleridge, that it is "one of the divinest compositions of man." It is happily true also to say that its message has never been more "nigh" to any generation than to our own. In spite of what some would tell us, there never was an age in which there was a more widespread capacity for appreciating ideals; and it is becoming increasingly evident that we can only be satisfied with ideals that are lofty and large. At the same time we are not slow to insist that they must be definite and clear.

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The more we study the Epistle to the Ephesians, the more we shall be confirmed in the belief that it has that to give us for which many are earnestly searching. It is from it that we may learn, as can be learnt nowhere else, the real significance, in the light of the Divine purpose, of the World, of the Church, and of the Individual. (*Note 11.*)

NOTES

1. The absence of personal greetings would be strange if the Epistle had been meant exclusively for a Church so familiar to St Paul as the Ephesian. There were such greetings even to the Colossians, whom he had never visited. This absence is most naturally accounted for if the letter was intended to be read in a succession of Churches.

The words in the original text for "at Ephesus" (i. 1) are absent from an important group of ancient manuscripts.

2. The word "mystery" was a favourite with St Paul. It is important, in view of certain recent controversies, to note that the word in the singular was "never used by Greek writers in connexion with the ancient mysteries."—T. K. Abbott, *Ephesians and Colossians*, p. 233.
3. "The whole compound involves the idea of unity effected out of diversity."—Bishop Lightfoot, *Notes on the Epistles of St Paul*, p. 321.

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4. Browning's *Saul*.

5. There is no justification for the translation "that filleth all in all." The passive rendering is supported by the early versions, and by Origen and Chrysostom, and the Latin commentators. "In some mysterious sense the Church is that without which the Christ is not complete, but with which He is or will be complete."—Dr Armitage Robinson, *Ephesians*, pp. 152, 42 f.

6. For a fuller treatment of the doctrine of Election, and its practical results, the present writer may be allowed to refer to his chapter on the Creed in *The Church Catechism Explained*.

The following words of the late Lord Bryce are worth quoting as an illustration of the importance of this method as shown in the development of civilisation. They occur in his "Romanes Lecture," delivered at Oxford.

"For the future of mankind nothing is more vital than that some races should be maintained at the highest level of efficiency, because the work they can do . . . will determine the general progress of humanity."

7. "The Kingdom of God is to be something wider than the Church, which exists to prepare for it."—Bishop Gore, *Ephesians*, p. 270.

8. The word employed by St Paul—*arrabon*—was the strongest he could use for a pledge. "It is a part of the whole, the same in kind."—Bishop Lightfoot.

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9. "In St Paul's writings the Biblical doctrine of the operation of the Holy Spirit reaches its completion. The Apostle sees in the Spirit of Christ the source of the vital unity which inspires the Church, the quickening and compacting power of the new creation. He teaches with equal clearness that the Spirit has come to regenerate and restore the personal life of each of the baptised."—Dr Swete, Art. "Holy Spirit," in *Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible*.
10. "His heart, his imagination, his intellect is full of the thought of the catholic society as it exists in Christ, the extension of His life; of this society as the outcome of an eternal and slow-working purpose of God; of this society, as having universal divine ends for humanity, and for the universe; of this society, as affording a sphere in which all man's faculties may be enlightened and delighted with the depth and largeness of the divine purpose; while his whole being is kept safe from all the delusions of pride, in continual and conscious dependence upon divine grace."—Bishop Gore, *Ephesians*, p. 76.
11. "The old world was shaped by the intermediate groupings of mankind—family, race, and nation. Christianity, taking up the tentative efforts of later times, established the two extremes in union, individualism and communism. Thus the single human being

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for the first time reaches his true dignity : but only in relation to the human race and to the Church, which is mankind knowing and fulfilling its destiny."—Dr Hort, *The Way, the Truth, the Life*, p. 219.

IV

THE EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

THE FAITH AND PHILOSOPHY

ONCE only in the New Testament does the word "philosophy" occur, and that is in the Epistle to the Colossians.

There have at all times been some who have depreciated philosophy, and have wondered at the attraction which it has had for any who have been enthusiastic about it. Yet there is no likelihood that the study of philosophy will cease for lack of those who are interested in it. It is as true now as when Aristotle wrote that "all men by nature are eager to know"; and there are, and always will be, men and women more than ordinarily stirred by the desire to gain the largest possible views, and the deepest possible understanding, of the meaning of the Universe. In regard to this, as to some other undertakings which seem to have few practical advantages to offer, it can be said with truth that men will have ceased to be men when adventures of the kind no longer appeal to their curiosity and courage.

Moreover, we have to remember that the alternative at any time is not likely to be between philosophy and no philosophy; but between a reasonable and

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healthy philosophy, and a philosophy that is irrational and injurious.

Many of us had got into the habit of assuming that our own countrymen had but little aptitude and less care for philosophy, until there appeared among us a variety of strange cults, with rapidly increasing numbers of ardent adherents; and it became evident that multitudes of people were thirsting for some kind of metaphysical explanation of things, and were in danger of being carried off by theories and speculations of the weirdest description, if nothing stronger and saner could be provided for them.

As it is, we are often gravely perplexed to know how to deal with these movements; and, indeed, are in doubt as to the whole subject of philosophy, and as to the attitude that ought to be adopted towards it. We should be glad, therefore, to have guidance and advice from a teacher of more than ordinary experience and of exceptional spiritual sagacity.

It will be best to begin by reminding ourselves of the particular situation which was the occasion for the writing of the Epistle.

Colossæ was not an important place. Nothing remains of it now, and we might never have heard its name had it not been for this letter. A Church had been planted there, not by St Paul, who it would seem had not himself visited the town, but by one of his disciples, a Gentile named Epaphras, who seems to have been sent there to act as his representative. He had subsequently gone to

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Rome, evidently in a state of much anxiety, and it was from him that the Apostle had learnt what led him to write as he did.

The report received from Epaphras was in many ways most satisfactory. Good progress had been made, and there was a real desire on the part of the Colossians to advance to higher knowledge. But the question was what this knowledge was to be.

If we are to understand the problem, we must try to realise the conditions that then prevailed in Asia Minor.

The conquests of Alexander had introduced Greek life into these regions, more than three centuries before; and Greek kingdoms had been established by those who had inherited his empire. There had also been large importations of Jewish families. As a result, "the mixture of Greek and Jewish thought was far more conspicuous in Asia Minor than in Europe." (*Note 1.*)

It is not difficult to imagine what might come of such a combination on Asiatic soil of Jewish faith and Greek speculation, especially when attempts were made to deal with the deepest mysteries of the Divine nature and world-creation. Programmes would be produced which would excite great expectations that would as certainly be most inadequately fulfilled.

This is Professor Ramsay's account of what did happen, gathered from his special knowledge of the period and the locality, as well as from the hints that are to be found in the Epistle itself.

"In the cities of Asia, Phrygia, South Galatia, and Cilicia—all along the great roads leading east and

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west across Asia Minor, the minds of men were filled with crude attempts at harmonising and mingling Oriental (especially Jewish) and Greek ideas."

"Vain speculation, unable to support itself in its lofty flight, unable to comprehend the real unity of the world in God, invented for itself silly genealogies, in which nature and creation were explained under the empty fiction of sonship, and a chain of divine beings in successive generations was made and worshipped; and human nature was humbly made subservient to these fictitious beings, who were described as 'angels.' " (*Note I.*)

We wonder, perhaps, that such a medley of notions should have had any attraction for well-instructed Christians. It must however be remembered that there is a fascination in daring novelties of intellectual speculation; and the more so when these are combined with rules and disciplines that promise to lead to mystical illumination.

What then, we have to ask, was the attitude of St Paul towards these would-be philosophers and guides?

Clearly he regarded the situation as serious, and even alarming. He did not conceal his distrust and dislike of the new doctrines and methods. It is plain what he thought of these men's affected superiority and of their assumptions of extraordinary insight; of their seeming humility in paying to intermediaries of their own invention the reverence that belonged to the Most High, and of the crude materialism which was associated with and, strange

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as it might seem to say so, was occasioned by their constant preoccupation with the thought of the malignity of Matter.

But we shall seriously misunderstand the purpose of the Epistle if we suppose that its object was only, or even mainly, to warn and condemn. We cannot think of St Paul as an avowed enemy of every kind of philosophy. His upbringing at Tarsus had left an impress upon his mental development; and the scene at Athens would be enough to prove the wideness of his intellectual sympathies, even if we had not other evidences of his love of a true wisdom. We must not suppose that in this Epistle he meant to assert that all philosophy was "vain deceit." A careful examination of his language shows that he was referring to the particular philosophy that had been paraded before the Colossians. He would have them know that this kind had no right to the title which had been assumed for it. (*Note 2.*)

We may go even further and say that it does not need much reading between the lines to perceive that for St Paul even this debased and puerile philosophy was so far of use that it had served to bring into clearer consciousness for himself certain elements and aspects of truth which might not otherwise have stood out with such vividness.

The aim of his Epistle was to prove to its readers that the new teachers would serve them best by making it clear to them that they had in reality nothing of value to offer that was not contained and known, or waiting to be known, in what they had already received and welcomed as the "truth of the Gospel." This explains why he had

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so much to say about "truth," and "knowledge," "the knowledge of God," "wisdom and knowledge," "all spiritual wisdom and understanding," and about the "full assurance of understanding"; and why again and again he spoke of "the mystery," "the mystery of Christ."

We can see also why it is in this Epistle that we have the magnificent Christological passage, unmatched for the boldness with which it proclaims the priority and supremacy of Christ in His unique position as controller and consummator of all things. We remember the words: "Who is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation" (by which is meant that He preceded all created things, see *Note 3*), "for in him were all things created, in the heavens and upon the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; . . . and he is before all things, and in him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the Church: who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; that in all things he might have the pre-eminence, for it was the good pleasure of the Father that in him should all the fulness dwell."

Did the new teachers, then, profess to have special insight into the problems of cosmic origins and agencies? Did they talk mysteriously of the "pleroma," the fulness, the immense totality that comprehends within itself all thinking things, all objects of thought? Did they undertake to lead their disciples by special methods and esoteric experiences to a mystical knowledge of the Divine?

The Colossians should understand that in the

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Christian revelation they possessed greater and deeper truths, more satisfying to heart and head, and more potent to bring the regenerating influences of heaven into the affairs and relationships of earth; truths whose glory was that they were open to all, and were not the exclusive property of an exceptionally cultured few.

Most earnestly does the Apostle plead that they should not allow themselves to be led away by teachers who had really nothing to give them which could be any substitute for what they would be asked to surrender.

So much then as to the original situation. We have now to attempt the more difficult and delicate task of trying to see the significance of the Epistle for us whose lot is cast in the circumstances in which we find ourselves to-day. At first sight these circumstances may seem to have little in common with those we have been describing; but, as we look closer, we may find reason for thinking that our situation is not after all very unlike that of long ago.

There are few things more characteristic of the times in which we are living than the marked way in which Philosophy is holding out its hand to Religion. This is probably true in a degree and on a scale in which it has never been so true before. The change of attitude on the part of philosophy has been the result of causes which it is well to understand.

The first of these is the greatly increased respect that is now felt for the evidence that experience affords as to the nature of Reality. And what is

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specially to be noted is that religious experience is now recognised as being of the very greatest importance. Striking testimony to this effect is to be met with in the two volumes recently published, under the editorship of Professor Muirhead, entitled *Contemporary British Philosophy*. Out of many passages that might be selected, the following may be taken as examples of opinions which on this matter are of exceptional interest.

"There is one thing which speculative philosophy must take into most serious consideration, and that is the religious and mystical experiences of mankind."

"From the first I have recognised the supreme importance of religion as a basis for the kind of unity at which we ought to aim."

"The nearest approach to a consciousness of all reality is found in religious experience." (*Note 4.*)

It is not surprising that the editor himself should say in his preface to the second volume (1925): "There has sprung up a wholly new appreciation of the independent and permanent significance of religious experience in human life." Indeed he goes so far as to describe the change that has taken place as "an entire revolution."

A second cause, which has been working powerfully in the same direction, has been the establishment, or perhaps we ought to say the re-establishment, in philosophic circles of a doctrine which is producing, and is yet to produce, great transformations in the science of logic, as well as in social and political theories. It is the doctrine of what is called "the priority of the whole."

According to this doctrine, some sense of the

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universal, the infinite, the absolute, necessarily precedes the mind's conception of the particular, the finite, the relative; and has to be presupposed as an indispensable *sine qua non* of all our thinking.

It would now be very generally allowed that Philosophy is rightly to be defined as "just the attempt to describe the process of the finite without losing sight of the whole in the parts." (*Note 5.*)

This means that, behind the parts and differences which we are able to separate and discriminate by "selective attention," behind even our consciousness of "self," the existence has to be recognised of an objective reality, intuitively apprehended; in other words, of the infinite, the eternal, the spiritual.

How far the philosopher is prepared to go in his insistence upon this essentially necessary presupposition can be gathered from the words with which Mr Bradley concluded his most famous work, *Appearance and Reality*. "Outside spirit," he wrote, "there is not and there cannot be any reality; and the more that anything is spiritual, so much the more it is inevitably real."

Again, it is only the truth to say that no one can have followed the course of recent philosophical thinking without being impressed by the growing earnestness with which, in loyalty to this principle of the priority of the whole, attention has been directed to the study of social and national problems; and to the duty of service, and the gain of subordinating the interests of the individual to the well-being of the community at large. Sometimes a height of ethical idealism has been reached which must command our very warmest admiration.

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The bearing of all this upon the relations of philosophical and religious thought is obvious. The language now often employed by philosophy is hardly distinguishable from that which we have been accustomed to associate with religion. We may go even further, and say that there are not wanting proposals to the effect that the interests and fuller developments of religion amongst us might now with advantage be entrusted to the guidance and care of Philosophy.

Our first impulse is to welcome most heartily and hopefully the altered attitude and outlook of philosophy. It would be strange if we did not acknowledge that there is much in the change that has taken place for which we have good cause to be thankful. But it does not follow that we ought not to examine most carefully into the new doctrines and proposals before we can unreservedly accept them; and we are certainly bound to do this before we can think of regarding them as a possible substitute for the teachings of religion.

Such an examination demands, no doubt, unusual knowledge and skill on the part of those who can be trusted to make it; but there are conclusions of a more general character which may be safely arrived at by any serious thinkers, even though they are not trained metaphysicians; and it must be said that these conclusions suggest very strongly the need of something more than an attitude of caution.

The most serious defect in the philosophical programme, as viewed from the religious standpoint, is the extreme vagueness of the conception it offers of

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the spiritual generally, and more especially of the Infinite, the All, the Absolute. Of this, we are told that it can only be to be thought of as an undifferentiated oneness, within which all relationships are submerged; in which, consequently, no distinctions of good and evil can exist, and in the sum total of which there can be nothing like will, or character, or consciousness, or personality as we are accustomed to understand these. This means that no thought of any worship of the Absolute is to be entertained. (*Note 6.*)

When, further, it is found that there is a like indefiniteness in regard to the nature of human personality, with a consequent uncertainty as to its survival in a future state, we cannot but realise that there are very serious dangers in any indiscriminate acceptance of these revivals of ancient speculations.

No doubt the extreme "monistic" doctrine has already led to a strong reactionary movement amongst philosophers themselves, with the result that some of them have adopted a "pluralistic," almost a polytheistic, interpretation of the spiritual forces of the universe. But the inadequacy of this view is revealed by its abandonment of any search after an ultimate unity, and by its acknowledged despair of being able to give any reasonable account of the existence of evil. Indeed, the form in which certain proposals of this school have been put forward, involving as it does the notion of colleges of elemental spirits, reminds us even more surprisingly of the mythological hierarchies of the teachers in Asia Minor.

What, then, is it our duty to think and to do?

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Two courses are open to us. We may get into a panic, and allow ourselves to be driven to the conclusion that the proffered assistance of philosophy is only a delusion and a snare, all too likely to lead to the abandonment of truths which we have been taught to regard as of vital importance; or we may adopt what would certainly seem to be a braver and more hopeful course.

We may decide that we ought to look upon the activities of modern philosophy as a not unfriendly challenge to a deeper and more determined investigation into the wealth which is ours in the Christian inheritance; believing that there are fresh discoveries yet to be made, as well as forgotten or neglected treasures to be brought to light again.

Perhaps it ought to be said that we do well to remember that there are dangers in more directions than one. As a matter of fact, we have had in our own time a plain demonstration of the unwisdom of an attempt from the side of religion to make a breach between itself and philosophy. This was done on the Continent by the Ritschlian school, which has had among ourselves its representatives who have exercised no inconsiderable influence. The object of this school has been to set theology free from the metaphysical complications which it held to have been due to a too close association with the philosophy of the early centuries. It cannot be said that the result of this effort has been satisfactory. The simplifying of theology that was promised has turned out to have been achieved by the omission to a large extent of its idealistic and mystical elements;

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and the general effect has been to encourage the tendency towards the "reduced Christianity" which we have had only too much cause to deplore.

But even apart from such an experience there is the consideration that our present line of study has been commending to us. We cannot doubt which of the two courses would have been more in accord with the mind of St Paul. He would certainly have urged us to make the proposals of Philosophy the starting-points for a fresh investigation of our Christian faith. We may go further and say that the very truths of the Gospel towards which he directed the thoughts of the Colossians, in view of the dangers that beset them, are just those we ourselves most need to reconsider when we are confronted with teachings which claim to be more intelligible and more in harmony with the assumptions and conclusions of modern thought.

To begin with, St Paul confidently appealed to the Christian doctrine of Creation as far simpler and nobler than the speculations about emanations that were put forward as improvements upon it; and we may well feel that the opportunity for a fresh study is specially favourable at the present moment, when biology has expressly discredited the merely mechanical theory which had been so widely accepted as the only scientific account of evolution. It would not be over-sanguine to hope for a much more sympathetic understanding of the first article of the Creed if it could be agreed that a reasonable investigation of the world-process ought no longer to be hampered by a refusal to admit the possibility of new beginnings, and by an unwilling-

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ness to trace the presence of a transcendent purpose working by methods which allow for liberty within the boundaries of law. (*Note 7.*)

And, if we are called to think more deeply about the Christian doctrine of Creation, contrasting its strength and clearness with the indefiniteness and unintelligibility of any of the notions which have been advanced as alternatives for it, we are no less called to concentrate reverent attention upon that which is distinctive in the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation. Whether we are to gain help from Philosophy, associated as it now is with psychology, in our study of the terms in which Christology has come down to us, remains to be seen. There is at all events one direction in which we are not unlikely to derive assistance from its more recent thoughts. We have been told with much reiteration by some exponents of Modernism that we are bound to lay the main emphasis in our teaching upon the humanitarian aspect of the person of Christ, because it is an axiom of all right instruction that we should start from, and define everything in the terms of, the things we know best. But what if it should prove that our philosophers are right when they assure us that what we know first and most intimately is the fact of the spiritual reality?

If that is true, shall we not be drawn more and more to the old conclusion that the Christ of St Paul, and of the Creeds—"the image of the invisible God"—is the presentation of our Lord that is certain to make the most powerful appeal to that which is simplest, as well as to that which is highest and deepest in our human nature? (*Note 8.*)

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We must not forget that for St Paul the claims of Christianity necessarily included a practical application of the highest idealism to the commonest relationships and occupations of daily life. And here, too, it looks as if we might hope to receive some fresh light upon his meaning from philosophical teaching. Its earnest enforcement of the need of "participation in the whole" may well recall to us the Apostle's insistence that all the problems of life, domestic, social and industrial, are so many occasions for proving what is possible to Christians when their experiences are heightened and transfigured by the sense of the fellowship "in the Lord." But we must not overlook the fact that for St Paul it was not enough to win assent to a general principle of corporate living. For him all that was vital in applied Christianity depended upon "holding," not only the Body, but "the Head."

We come then, at last, to this. We are not to over-value, and we are not to under-value, philosophy. We shall make a great mistake if we ignore the help of the stimulus that philosophy can give to the understanding and appreciation of religious truths.

It was very significant that in one of its Resolutions the last Lambeth Conference of the Anglican bishops (1920) "urges all thinking people to safeguard the Christian position by a further study of the Bible, Creed, and Sacraments in the light of sound Christian scholarship and philosophy."

We are not, it need hardly be said, to neglect the simpler teaching of the faith. Very far from it.

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We need more missionaries like Epaphras, filled with love and the enthusiasm for winning souls. But what we have also to remember is this, that, if the work of these elementary teachers is to bear its permanent fruit, we need those as well who can combine with the gifts of the evangelist the clear thought of the master-instructor; those, that is to say, who possess, even though it be in a far smaller measure, the combination of sympathies and abilities that was so conspicuously seen in St Paul. (*Note 9.*)

NOTES

1. Prof. W. M. Ramsay, *Letters to the Seven Churches*, pp. 133, 137.
2. "The sense is nearly, his philosophy, so called, which is vain deceit." "It is clear from the connexion that St Paul is not condemning philosophy in general, which indeed would be quite beside his purpose."—T. K. Abbott, *Ephesians and Colossians*, p. 246.
3. After a full discussion of this phrase Dr Abbott concluded that "the only tenable interpretation of the words is: 'begotten before every created thing.'"—*Op. cit.*, p. 212 f.
4. C. D. Broad, J. S. Mackenzie, J. B. Baillie.—*Contemporary British Philosophy*, i. pp. 245, 33.
5. This simple definition of philosophy was given in a remarkable article by Edward Caird, on "The Argument for the Being of God," which

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appeared in the first number of the *Journal of Theological Studies*, October 1899.

6. That we may not do injustice to Mr Bradley's views it is but right to quote his own words. He has said quite unmistakably, "There is no history or progress in the Absolute." "Viewed in relation to the Absolute, there is nothing bad or good, there is not anything better or worse." "Will, implying a process in time, cannot belong as such to the Absolute."—*Appearance and Reality*, pp. 276, 411, 413.

We cannot wonder that Dr Rashdall should have described such a teaching as "hopelessly destructive of all that plain men have been in the habit of understanding by Religion and Morality."—*Hibbert Journal*, April 1920, p. 28.

So again Mr Bradley has given it as his opinion that "to deny the possibility of a life after death would be quite ridiculous." Nevertheless he went on to add that "a future life must be taken as decidedly improbable."—*Op. cit.*, pp. 502, 506.

7. "What biology seems justified in holding firm to is that there has been a frequent *epigenesis*, or new formation."

"It may be very naïve on the biologist's part, but it does not appear likely that any argument that being is a fixed quantity will affect his belief that insects and birds were downright novelties."

"Evolution is a series of great inventions."—

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Prof. J. A. Thompson, *System of Animate Nature*, ii. pp. 244, 367.

“The idea of absolute Creation, which is implicit in the highest teaching of the Hebrew Prophets, is entirely absent from the philosophical reflections of the Greeks.” “Creation theories differ from theories of emanation.” “The idea of absolute creation is fully developed only in Christian theology.”—Dr W. R. Matthews, *Studies in Christian Philosophy*, pp. 194-200.

8. “It is urged that what we want is a human, not a superhuman or infinite ideal, an example, not of what is possible for a God in human shape, or for a human nature rendered infallible by association or combination with an omnipotent divine nature, but of what is possible for man, for a nature really and simply human. But the answer is, that not the latter but the former, not a finite but an infinite ideal, is what we truly want. It is of the very nature of the moral and spiritual life that its ideal is not a finite one. Our aim as spiritual beings is not likeness to man, but likeness to God, participation in a divine and eternal life.”—Principal John Caird, *Fundamental Ideals of Christianity*, pp. 118 f.
9. It is interesting to note the following as a recent statement of a philosopher's conception of the relations which should exist between philosophy and religion.

“The business of metaphysical philosophy

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is in a way a modest one. It has to be content to recognise that in the sciences, in history, in morality and religion it is dealing with a reality which is in the end simply 'given' and not to be explained away. . . . It has not to invent an improved substitute for historically real religion and morality, but to fathom as much as it can of their significance. . . . And it becomes a question whether, after all, the main service of metaphysical study to the mind is not to liberate it from prejudices, and thus to prepare it to receive illumination from sources outside metaphysics." — Prof. A. E. Taylor, *Contemporary British Philosophy*, ii. p. 272 (1925).

V

THE EPISTLE OF ST JAMES

A SAINT'S VIEW OF LIFE

IN passing from St Paul's to certain other Epistles we shall give the first place to that of St James, the brother of the Lord, and the first Bishop of Jerusalem.

The Epistle, in many respects remarkable, is not without its problems. About one of these a few words had better be said at once, since it meets us at the outset of our examination. The problem is that of its language and literary style. How is the fact to be explained that it came to be written in Greek of the purest classical type? As to the fact itself there can be no question. We may accept the opinion of one who was well qualified to speak on the matter. In the introduction to his commentary, Prof. J. B. Mayor went so far as to say, "I should be inclined to rate the Greek of this Epistle as approaching more nearly to the standard of classical purity than that of any other book of the New Testament, with the exception perhaps of the Epistle to the Hebrews."

It is true that Prof. Mayor did not consider the difficulty to be an impossible obstacle in the way of the acceptance of the authorship of St

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James. On the contrary, he urged that "Galilee was studded with Greek towns, and it was certainly in the power of any Galilean to gain a knowledge of Greek." In support of this contention he says that "not many years before, four of the most accomplished men of the time were natives of Galilee," and he gives their names: "Philodemus, the Epicurean, a friend of Cicero; Theodorus, the instructor of Tiberius in rhetoric; Meleager, the famous writer of epigrams; and Menippus the cynic." "Meleager calls it the Syrian Athens." (*Note 1.*)

Dr Hort took a similar view as to the possibility of acquiring a good knowledge of the Greek language in Galilee, and added that it has to be remembered that St James may have sojourned with the Holy Family for some time, possibly for some years, in Egypt.

We shall agree that all this is most interesting, though we may not feel satisfied that the problem has as yet been completely solved. It certainly is not easy to associate the particular kind of culture exhibited in the style of the Epistle, as we have it, with what we can learn about St James from the New Testament, or from tradition.

It was a relief, therefore, to meet recently with a suggestion which seemed to offer a better hope of solution. According to this, the Epistle is a Greek rendering of what was originally an Aramaic discourse addressed to some Jewish Christian community by James the brother of the Lord.

The idea is that after the city had been destroyed in A.D. 70, and the older Jewish Christians had been compelled to take refuge in a few outlying

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districts of Palestine and its neighbourhood, the re-established Church in Jerusalem—Aelia as it was called—was Greek-speaking, if not wholly Gentile. Its members would cling to the associations of the past, and might well be anxious to regard St James as their historical ancestor. What more natural, then, than that they should have rescued the Epistle and translated it, clothing it in literary dress which would render it the more acceptable, and with which we are familiar? This would account for “the classical non-Biblical expressions,” and for “the Septuagintal language of the Scriptural allusions.” (*Note 2.*)

If we may adopt this explanation, and it does seem to have much in its favour, we shall think of the Epistle as being in substance very early, but as having been preserved in a form of later date.

That the persons originally addressed were Jewish Christians is evident enough. Their characteristics, as we have them described, are unmistakable. We are reminded of the kind of people that Tissot has painted so vividly; excitable, loud-speaking, quickly stirred to anger, priding themselves on their orthodoxy, ambitious of the respect paid to superior knowledge, and by no means indifferent to the admiration which the world accords to wealth.

The setting and colouring are decidedly Eastern. As we read we seem to be transported to Palestine, with its olives and vines and figs, its early and latter rains, its fleeting clouds, and salt and bitter springs, its scorching sirocco wind, its sight of the ships that are so great, and its sound of the waves of the sea.

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And, when we are carried in thought yet farther afield, it is still to those who are Jewish by race; to the settlers dispersed through the Levant. We note the description of their synagogues and legal tribunals, their trading from city to city, and even the treatment of their sick.

And what of the writer himself? Who exactly was he; and how are we to think of his position and outlook? What, for instance, ought we to understand when he is referred to as "the brother of the Lord"?

The matter is not free from difficulty; but, in spite of certain expressions in the Gospels which taken by themselves might lead to a different conclusion, we may be content to believe that the oldest ecclesiastical tradition was not wrong in holding that the "brethren" of the Lord were the sons of Joseph by a former marriage, and were called His brethren in the same sense in which Joseph was called His father. (*Note 3.*)

It certainly is easier to understand why the Lord's brethren were so slow to be convinced of His unique mission and character, if they were considerably His seniors, trained on the strictest lines of traditional piety; while on the other hand it is almost impossible to believe that He could, as a last legacy, have entrusted His mother to the charge of a disciple, however much beloved, if she had sons of her own to whose care she might have been committed.

The selection of St James to be the official head of the Church in Jerusalem may have been due to this relationship, and to the fact that the elder Apostles were more likely to be called away to distant fields

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of work. (*Note 4.*) It may also have been influenced by the knowledge of the great reverence with which he was regarded by the whole Jewish community. According to an early tradition, he alone was permitted to go into the most sacred part of the temple, where he was to be found "for ever worshipping God" and "asking forgiveness for the people," until, through his much praying, "his knees became hard like a camel's." (*Note 5.*)

When we gather together the impressions we are thus enabled to form of St James, we are led to think of him, not as a great thinker, nor a great worker, but as a great saint; using that word in its more restricted and technical sense. In this sense the expression suggests, not perhaps unusual intellectual powers, nor the very widest sympathies, not great alacrity to accept what was new; but deep sincerity, some austerity, well-defined separation from the world, and a marked regularity of devotion and discipline. He was a man, we may suppose, who looked at life very much as did Dominic and à Kempis after him, and who knew, possibly even better than they, the special temptations and perils, as well as the special privileges and opportunities, of the exclusively religious vocation.

It has seemed worth while to say so much by way of introduction. We must now proceed to that which is our main business, the consideration of the contents of the Epistle, and of their value for ourselves at the present time.

We need not spend long upon what has been in the past a great crux to interpreters, the question of

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the relation of the teachings in regard to Faith of St Paul and St James. There is now a general agreement that the simplest explanation is the best. It is not necessary to suppose that either of them was referring to the words of the other; still less that they were deliberately opposing one another. The truth seems to be that while "the teaching of St Paul had the effect of affixing an eternal stigma in the Church of Christ upon dead works—external observances without the inner life; that of St James branded with lasting condemnation a dead faith—intellectual belief separated from moral activity." (*Note 6.*)

In other words, the two positions were complementary. The teachers were like men standing back to back, upon common ground, dealing with assaults delivered from diametrically opposite quarters.

It is generally taken for granted that the Epistle does not lend itself to analysis of a strictly logical kind. This does not mean that it was without a method of its own. After a manner which was characteristic of Hebrew compositions, its thoughts appear to have been gathered about certain topics which were brought up for discussion again and again. They were just those that would be likely to engage the attention of such a man as we have described St James to have been.

His first concern was with the WORLD. He regarded it as a place of exile and trial. That for him was the most hopeful view he could take. He was keenly alive to its dangers, to the seductions of its pomps and vanity. He saw how easily its

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standards might be admitted into the Church; and he earnestly warned his readers against allowing its pleasures and competitions to occupy and disturb their hearts.

His next thought was of that which is the only certain antidote to the glamour of the world, a living faith in God.

The theology of St James can be very simply stated. God is the source and the pattern of goodness. He is the Father of lights, and He is not for an instant to be confounded with the evil that is in the world. We are to be like Him. As He is One, so must we be single-hearted. Faith in Him is no passive acceptance of a proposition; it involves the doing of His will. He has been revealed in the Lord, "the Lord of glory"; and He has put His Spirit within us.

From all this it follows that Christians are bound strenuously to seek after perfection by the DISCIPLINE of their entire being. One passion and failing after another has to be overcome and corrected. There must be the guarded tongue, the clean hands, and the pure heart. The troubles of life are to be accepted as contributing to this end; whether they come in the form of loss of property, ill-treatment by others, or bodily sickness. The true remedies are patience in suffering, a sense of greatness in poverty, humility under chastisement, and in all things prayer. (*Note 7.*)

This, in briefest outline, is the kind of teaching we find in St James. Simple as it sounds, we have only to look into it to realise how deep it goes, and

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how fundamental it is. And a very little thought should convince us that there is very much in it that is capable of direct application to our conditions to-day. Indeed, the difficulty is to select the points that are the most obviously appropriate.

We might, for example, notice St James's insistence upon the sterner aspects of religious practice as important at a time when the popular demand is all for an easy religion, and when there is little inclination to submit to discipline, or to recognise the wisdom of living by rule.

Or we might observe what is said about the distractions that beset the inner life of the soul, and are a main cause of doubt and spiritual weakness. Or, again, we might feel that we should all of us be the better for laying to heart the warnings against unbridled licence of irresponsible criticism in these days of much speaking and hasty judgments.

But, in addition to these more general lessons, there are some other subjects that have a special interest for us just now, in connexion with which we may well value the help that a great saint can give.

Let us notice more particularly what St James had to say about three of these—about the duty of Prayer, the Anointing of the Sick, and the relations of Capital and Labour.

There is nothing in regard to which most of us more often feel the need of assistance than the whole matter of Prayer. We know that prayer is the pulse of the soul; that the religious life can be tested by its strength and regularity; and we have

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reason to think that the real value of what we do chiefly depends upon the quality of our prayers. And yet how many questions there are, and how hard we find it to pray aright, and to continue in prayer. We might hope that a Saint whose knees grew hard through much praying would be able to give us some wise and practical guidance; and we shall not be disappointed if we study his words. They might have been written to answer the very questions that are most frequently discussed amongst us. In fact, they supply in a remarkable way the materials that would be needed to make a complete manual of the difficult art.

If we take the passages in the order in which they occur, we shall see that it would not be difficult to arrange their teaching in the form of a catechism. Its questions and answers might be something like this :

Does prayer mean trying to change the mind and will of God ?

No, certainly not. When we approach Him, we ought to remember that He is our Father, the one and only source of every good and perfect gift; and that in Him there can be no variation or shadow of turning. The recognition of this first principle may be said to make the essential difference between Christian and pagan prayers.

Is it, then, necessary to pray ?

Yes, it is necessary. The rule is : If we want, we must ask, " Ye have not because ye ask not." There was nothing in regard to which the teaching of Christ was more plain than this.

Why are some prayers answered, and some not ?

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Because it is possible to pray badly. "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss."

What are bad prayers?

Bad prayers are prayers that are not big enough—narrow, selfish, material prayers. "Ye ask that ye may spend it in your pleasures." God can answer big prayers more readily than He can answer small ones.

Ought we, then, to pray for material benefits? May we, for example, rightly ask for help in sickness; or for an improvement in the weather?

To say "no," as some have been inclined to do, would seem to deny the propriety of the petition, "Give us this day our daily bread." St James had no doubt on the subject. It is not a little remarkable that the instances to which he refers as examples of successful prayers are both of this kind. "Is any among you suffering? let him pray . . . let them pray." "Elijah prayed fervently that it might not rain; and it rained not. He prayed again; and the heaven gave rain." (Note 8.)

Are there any other things that ought to be remembered in regard to prayer?

Yes, there are two things. In the first place, it ought to be remembered that prayers are more effective when several persons unite to offer them. That was our Lord's teaching; and we find the same thought in St James. "Call for the elders of the church; and let them pray." If the sick man could not go to church, the church was to go to him. In this matter union is strength.

And, further, this also is to be remembered. Prayers are most availing when they are prompted

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by a distinct apprehension of what the Divine intention is. That appears to have been the meaning of St James's expression, "the prayer of faith." It was such an apprehension that furnished the motive of the prayer he had more especially in his mind, the prayer of Elijah, as this is described in the eighteenth chapter of the First Book of Kings. The chapter opens with the Divine announcement, "I will send rain," and closes with the account of the prophet bowed seven times in an agony of supplication. That was "the prayer of faith," the prayer which refused to be daunted by difficulties or delays, because of the certainty of its conviction as to the course that the Divine will purposed to take. It is the same principle that was laid down by St John when he wrote: "This is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us." If we are wise, we train ourselves to be susceptible to the Divine intimations. It is these that can be turned into the most successful prayers.

So we are brought back again to our starting-point, as we assure ourselves once more that true prayer is the endeavour, not to change, but to accomplish the will of God.

The custom in the Church of Anointing the Sick with oil cannot be securely attested before the fourth century. After that it was continued for many centuries, and was held to have been authorised by the recommendation of St James. (*Note 9.*)

It has been almost entirely in abeyance with us since the Prayer-book of 1549; but there is now a

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strong desire on the part of some that it should be re-established by authority.

There are two things which it is important to bear in mind when we are asked to consider the matter. In the first place we should remember that, when St James recommended the Anointing of the Sick, he was not introducing a practice with which his hearers were unfamiliar. It was fully in accord with the contemporary Jewish custom. When a man was ill, it was usual that the holiest of the Rabbis should be asked to go, alone or with others, to the sick man's chamber, and should exhort him to confession of sins. According to the Talmud, the visitor was to say: "Confess before thou diest, for there are many who have confessed and died not; others who did not confess have died. Perhaps on the merit of thy confession thou wilt recover." And there are indications that, in the absence of the regular physician, these revered visitors acted as doctors; doubtless anointing the sufferer with oil, since this was a recognised remedy among the Jews, and generally throughout the East. (*Note 10.*)

A further precedent is afforded by a passage in the Gospels (St Mark vi. 12), in which the disciples on their missionary tour are reported to have anointed when healing the sick. We are not expressly told that they had been instructed by our Lord to do so. Possibly they too were following a practice that was well known to them.

Then also, it is essential to a right understanding of St James that another point should be kept in mind, although it may be thought almost too obvious to need much insisting upon. While it is

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clear that the Saint's first concern was for the spiritual condition of the sick man, it is not less certain that he meant the anointing to be administered in the hope that, if it were God's will, it might be blessed as a means of restoration to bodily health. (Note 11.)

This was unquestionably the expectation of Christians in the early centuries, as is to be seen by their liturgies, and in the accounts that are preserved of their experiences. We are assured by a careful student of the early literature, that there is "no trace in the first seven centuries of persons *in articulo mortis* being anointed with the object of preparing them for death." "The Latin Church," he says, "changed its discipline and teaching concerning the unction of the sick, either in the latter part of the eighth century or, as is perhaps more probable, in the earlier part of the ninth century." "A similar change was effected in the Eastern Church at some date less easy to define with certainty."

With these facts before us it does not seem to be going too far to say that "the change was the result of an abandonment of the true interpretation of the Jacobean passage." (Note 12.)

If, then, we are to think of restoring the ancient practice of the Anointing of the Sick, with prayer for God's blessing, we must at all events be careful to see that we clearly understand what that practice actually was.

St James is always thought of as a most practical teacher. In this respect he was only one of the many who have combined the mystical tempera-

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ment with remarkable insight into ordinary affairs. We should not look to find him treating of the laws of economics, but there was no failure on his part to speak out plainly about the misuse of riches and the crying wrongs of the poor. He was well aware of the sufferings caused by the oppression of the profiteer, and of wages that were kept back by fraud. Nor was he blind to the fact that the selfishness may not be all on one side. The world being what it is, he evidently had no expectation that everything could be set right in a moment. Sometimes his outlook upon the future caused him to give advice which contains an element of surprise.

A few years ago the vicar of an important suburban parish was asked by the members of certain political clubs in his neighbourhood to allow them the use of his church for a parade service, and was invited to preach them a sermon, on the understanding that they were to choose the text. Rather weakly he said that he must know what the text was to be before he could consent to the condition. They told him that they wished for the words, "Go to, now, ye rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you." Still more weakly, surely, the vicar declined. It was inevitable to point out to him that he had lost the opportunity of pointing to St James's own moral: "Be patient therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord!"

Here we must conclude our sketch of the contents of the Epistle. We have seen enough, it is to be hoped, to convince us that the more carefully we

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study it, the more we shall be impressed by its wisdom. We may gratefully acknowledge how much poorer we should be if there had not come down to us these world-renouncing, God-honouring, self-restraining counsels of St James.

NOTES

1. Prof. J. B. Mayor, *St James*, p. xlii.
2. This suggestion was made by Prof. Burkitt in his *Christian Beginnings* (1924), pp. 69 f.
3. Such was the conclusion reached by Bishop Lightfoot after a thorough discussion of the available evidence. See his *Galatians*, Discursus ii.
4. According to Clement of Alexandria, James the Just was chosen by Peter and James and John to be Bishop of Jerusalem.
5. The reference is to the account of the second-century writer Hegesippus, as recorded by Eusebius in his *Church History*.
6. Godet, *Biblical Studies*, p. 224.
7. Striking coincidences between the Epistle and the letter of St James, as given in Acts xv. are noted by Professor Mayor in his article on St James in *Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible*, ii. p. 543.

The close connexion also between the Epistle and the Sermon on the Mount should

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not be overlooked. While there are no direct quotations, the likeness of the thought is unmistakable; notably with regard to the Fatherhood of God, the blessings of adversity, the dangers of wealth, the futility of empty profession, the principles of prayer, the misuse of oaths, and sins of censoriousness.

8. Towards the end of the last century a formidable attack upon the propriety of prayer for a change in physical conditions was made, by certain leaders of scientific thought, on the ground that the slightest alteration of this kind must necessarily involve a violation, or at least a suspension, of natural laws not less fixed and unalterable than those which regulate the motions of the planets. An effective reply to these arguments was made by no less an authority than Sir George Stokes. The following extracts will be sufficient to indicate the line that he took :

“Is it lawful or possible to pray for fine weather, with a view, suppose, to a plentiful harvest? . . . Does our physical knowledge authorise us in saying that the course of the weather is as much fixed as that of the planets in their orbits? I doubt it. . . . It is perfectly conceivable that a child, by lighting a bonfire, might produce an ascending current of air which in particular cases might suffice to initiate a movement which went on accumulating till it caused the condition of the atmosphere to be widely different from what it

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would have been if the child had not acted as I have supposed. It is not, therefore, by any means certain that the condition of the weather is solely determined by physical conditions, the effect of which could even conceivably be calculated beforehand. Hence it is conceivable that a change in the future of the weather might be made without any interference with the physical laws actually in operation.”—*Gifford Lectures*, 1891, pp. 217 f.

9. The earliest evidence of the Hallowing of Oil comes from the so-called “Canons of Hippolytus” and the allied documents, representing probably the Alexandrine practice of the end of the second century. But there it appears that the oil is hallowed, like the cheese and olives and other oblations, that God’s benediction may rest on the whole store of which the first-fruits are thus offered.
10. The facts as here stated are given on the authority of Dr Schechter, Reader in Talmudic Literature at Cambridge, by H. W. Fulford, in his *Epistle of St James*, pp. 117 f.
11. The following is a passage from the Report, issued in 1924, by an important Committee of Clergy and Doctors appointed at the request of the last Lambeth Conference :
“Spiritual healing must not exclude medical means or methods, which have their due share in the resulting recovery. When real spiritual

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treatment has been used, we claim that not merely is the disease treated or alleviated, but the whole nature of the patient is raised to a higher level. In other words, in spiritual healing the healing of the spirit is primary, the healing of the body secondary."

As an indication of the attitude that is likely to be adopted by the most thoughtful members of the medical profession in the matter of "spiritual healing," it is of interest to quote the words of the President of the British Medical Association at the recent annual meeting :

"The whole of their profession would await with impartial mind the results of the labours of the Joint Committee which was investigating the phenomena of spiritual healing. Meanwhile, he said with confidence, that any systematised creed which professed to dispense with the art of medicine and surgery was false to the Divine. But if any possessed the precious gift of ministering to the mind diseased, or of imparting to those who walked in the valley of the shadow the courage to move serenely among the phantoms and horrors which haunted that road, let them be sure that such a gift could only emanate from a Divine source, and let them welcome the help of any unseen wings that stirred the air with healing."—*Times*, July 21, 1926.

12. These quotations are taken from *The Anointing of the Sick*, by Father Puller, pp. 191-203.

VI

THE FIRST EPISTLE OF ST PETER

PRESENT SUFFERING AND ETERNAL HOPE

WE need feel no uncertainty as to whether the First Epistle of St Peter owed its origin to the Apostle whose name it bears. (*Note 1.*) This does not mean that no questions are raised by the Epistle which it is important to try to answer. There are certainly three such questions that we shall find it useful and interesting to ask: What was St Peter's position in the first days? Why did he write this Epistle? How can we best describe its contents and its character?

Round the first of these questions many storms of controversy have raged. On the one side, there have been extravagant claims; and on the other equally vehement denials. Thanks in large measure to the growth of the historical sense, we have now passed into a calmer and clearer atmosphere.

There is little disposition to-day to deny that St Peter was specially commissioned by our Lord to occupy a position of exceptional responsibility and authority in the Church. Most scholars would agree that "all attempts to explain the 'rock,' " in the famous passage of St Matthew's Gospel, "in any other way than as referring to Peter have

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ignominiously failed.” (*Note 2.*) But, while this is so, it does not follow that everything that has been asserted in regard to St Peter’s primacy can be unhesitatingly accepted.

If we may take St Paul’s words in the Epistle to the Galatians as defining the sense in which St Peter’s commission was originally interpreted, it is clear that it was to be exercised within certain recognised limits. “They saw that I had been entrusted with the Gospel of the uncircumcision, even as Peter with the Gospel of the circumcision.”

No doubt St Peter did open the door of the Church to receive Cornelius; and it is clear that he went very far at one time to meet the Hellenists at Antioch; but in both these instances he was dealing with persons who were on the fringe of Judaism, and who, if not actually proselytes, had travelled a long distance from heathenism. (*Note 3.*)

There is nothing in the Acts to suggest that St Peter ever went on missionary journeys to heathen races, or that he founded Churches among them.

That he did visit Rome, and that he died there, are well-authenticated historical facts; but no sufficient evidence exists to prove that he held an episcopate there for twenty-five years. (*Note 4.*)

The purpose of his visit to Rome is a matter of very great interest. We can hardly accept the argument that it must have been Rome to which he fled for safety, after his deliverance from prison, when, as we are told, he “went to another place.” But is it possible to offer any explanation of his visit that is likely to be more convincing? One such has been suggested; and, the more it is considered,

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the more there would appear to be said in its favour. We have witnessed in our time a healthy reaction from the once popular Tübingen theory, which rested upon the assumption of a radical opposition existing between St Peter and St Paul, and their respective schools.

That theory was the outcome of an attempted reconstruction of history, to fit the well-known Hegelian formula, rather than of any impartial study of the facts. It looks as if the simple truth is that the differences which undoubtedly distinguished the two Apostles, so far from keeping them apart, actually brought them together, and enabled them to present a united witness that must have been of incalculable value to the cause to which their lives were equally devoted.

What if St Peter ought to be regarded as the great peacemaker? May it not have been that he went to Rome at the request of St Paul, who had desired his presence as the surest of all means of promoting the harmony between the Jewish and Gentile sections of the Church, which was of vital importance to the future of Christianity?

Would not this explain why St Mark was there also? May he not have gone on in advance as the messenger and forerunner of St Peter?

And shall we not thus be greatly helped to understand why St Peter should have written the Epistle? May it not have been that he wrote it at the prompting of St Paul? (*Note 5.*) We gather that St Paul was greatly concerned about the state of things in Asia Minor, as this had been reported to him. He probably realised that there had

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already begun the weakening of his own hold upon the Churches there, which led him later to say: "all that are in Asia turned away from me."

What more natural than that he should have desired to avail himself of the powerful assistance of one whose name would carry much weight? And would it not have been most important to make it plain that the two leaders were working in hearty accord, in spite of any rumours that might have been circulated to the contrary?

Might not this account of the purpose and origin of the Epistle explain some things about it that otherwise are not very easily to be understood? It would explain, for instance, how it came to pass that a letter from St Peter should have been addressed, mainly if not exclusively, to Gentiles. (*Note 6.*) It explains also the evident dependence of the Epistle upon the writings of St Paul, and more especially upon Romans and Ephesians. (*Note 7.*) There was a time when this dependence was thought to be a difficulty in the way of accepting St Peter's authorship; but nothing could be more intelligible if, at the time of his visit, he had met with the Epistle to the Romans there on the spot, and had found St Paul full of the thoughts that were about to take shape in the Epistle to the Ephesians.

Then there is the problem raised by the language in which the Epistle was written. As in the case of St James, the difficulty is to account for the classical style of the Greek, so unlike what might have been expected from a fisherman. The Epistle contains

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words that do not elsewhere occur in the New Testament; indeed there is one word of which the only other example is said to have been found in Lucian. And it is more than a question of the vocabulary. There are all the indications of highly cultured scholarship. "We note the delicacy and accuracy of his perception in regard to the rhythmical arrangement of words, the use of synonyms, and the arrangement of tenses and prepositions." (*Note 8.*)

It is true that St Peter must have known some Greek. We can scarcely doubt that he used it in his speech at Pentecost, and in his address to Cornelius. But it would need much more than a colloquial acquaintance with the language to account for the somewhat elaborate and rhetorical style of the Epistle.

St Peter, as we learn from the early traditional accounts, was in the habit of employing St Mark as his "interpreter"; so that there would be nothing unusual in his availing himself in this instance of help of a similar kind. As a matter of fact, it is pretty clear that he meant it to be understood that he had done so. When he said that he was writing "by Silvanus, our faithful brother as I account him," it seems natural to suppose that he was referring to something more than the aid of a trustworthy messenger. The words suggest that he had put himself into the hands of one who was a more expert linguist than himself, upon whose accuracy and good faith he could rely with absolute confidence.

And is there not much that is significant in the selection of Silvanus in particular as his amanuensis? There is no reason to question that this Silvanus,

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or Silas, was the man who had been closely associated with St Paul, and was well known as such to the Churches of Asia. He would therefore have made a most admirable intermediary if, in addition to writing the Epistle, he carried it with greetings and messages from both the Apostles.

Our conclusion, then, may well be that the Epistle was St Peter's encyclical, written from Rome to the Christians of Asia Minor, with St Paul's most hearty concurrence, for the purpose of strengthening the brethren; which, it should be remembered, was a duty specially assigned to St Peter by the Lord Himself.

And now what are we to say of the actual contents of the Epistle? Knowing what we do of the author, we should scarcely expect to find in it closely reasoned theological discussions; and we do not. "We see in it no trace of systematic doctrinal exposition; it is entirely of a practical character; and if from time to time the author takes a spring into the sphere of dogmatic teaching, he cannot sustain himself long in these regions which are evidently unfamiliar to him, and he descends again immediately into the domain of moral application." (*Note 9.*) In other words, what we should look for are thoughts that might occur to the mind of any wise and far-seeing Christian instructor.

But we are soon made aware that in the writer of this Epistle we have one who was in no sense an ordinary teacher. At a glance we can recognise exceptional gifts, if only as shown by the use of illustrations. In this we have the evidence of

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quick observation, keen interest, and the widest sympathies. The range of the imagery is unusually large. All occupations and departments are laid under contribution. We are reminded of home and family life, as well as of pastoral and military life. Mention is made of building, and painting; of the stones of the temple, and the gold in the furnace; the grass in the field, the milk in the nursery, the sheep of the flock, and the lion roaring after its prey.

We have the metaphors of the bondservants of God, the stewards of grace, the cloke of maliciousness, the ornaments of fashion, the girdle of humility, and the crown of flowers that was not to fade away.

In this delight in illustration we may trace, perhaps, the influence of the example of the Greatest of masters. There are indeed no parables, but for St Peter, as for our Lord, the world was a wonderful schoolroom hung about with pictures and symbols; things on earth answering to things in heaven, each to the other "like" more than on earth is thought.

And when we ask what the lessons were which St Peter was more particularly desirous to teach, we have no difficulty in answering. They were lessons of *Suffering* and *Hope*; lessons which reach to the very deepest and highest in our nature.

It is worthy of remark that St Peter was more than commonly qualified to speak of the mystery of suffering.

He had himself received special training in the matter. We can mark the stages of his advance. We remember how he had stumbled when he had first heard our Lord's announcement of His

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coming sufferings; how severely he was rebuked; and how, none the less, when the time came to enter the shadow of the Cross, he forsook and denied his Master.

We can see that in the Acts he had got further towards a deeper understanding. He could point out that the Old Testament had foretold the sufferings of the Messiah. They must, therefore, have formed a part of the Divine plan. But of the reasons nothing was said.

In the Epistle we are brought nearer to a solution of the great problem. Suffering is part of the testing process, and without it moral teaching cannot be complete. The way of the Cross is the only way of light and of blessedness. The path of humiliation had led to Christ's exaltation. He has left us an example that we should follow in His steps.

And, if it was fitting that St Peter should be the speaker on the subject of Suffering, it was fitting also that he should speak of it at that particular time. Whether persecution had begun in the provinces is not quite certain. The probability is that it had; and that the prospect was not remote that Christians would be called upon to seal their testimony with their blood. It may have been the dread of this that had been overclouding and depressing the Churches of Asia. How natural that St Peter should wish to send them words of sympathy and cheer.

He let them see that he could enter most fully into their fears and forebodings. He knew that they were feeling homeless on earth. Dispersed

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and sojourners, they had been "put to grief in manifold trials"; they were sharers of the common lot in which "all flesh is as grass"; "pilgrims" on their journey, misinterpreted and misunderstood, doing well and "sufferers for righteousness sake," looking for "the fiery trial" which was to come. He entreated them not to be down-hearted. They should remember that "the same sufferings were being accomplished in their brethren who are in the world"; and they might be consoled by the ennobling thought that they were allowed to have a share in the sufferings of their Lord. Unmerited sufferings, patiently endured, he told them, were especially acceptable in the sight of God. (*Note 10.*)

And, if the present was dark, so much the more bright ought the future to appear. He would have them rejoice that they had been "begotten again unto a living hope," and that they had "an inheritance in heaven." Their "faith and hope" should be in God.

St Peter has been specially claimed as the Apostle of "the larger hope." The reference is, of course, to his statements in regard to the "spirits in prison," and the preaching of the good news to the departed in another life. The words which have naturally attracted a great deal of attention are these:

"Christ also suffered for sins . . . being put to death in the flesh, but quickened in the spirit; in which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison."

"For unto this end was the Gospel preached

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even to the dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit."

These statements have their difficulties. Not the least is to understand why it should have been those who had perished in the Flood who were singled out to receive more than common consideration. It is not unreasonable to suppose that St Peter saw in the ark a symbol of the Christian Church. This would seem to follow from the fact that he went on at once to draw a parallel between the waters of the flood and the water of baptism. Those who perished in the time of Noah might, therefore, be regarded as typical outsiders to whom a further opportunity had been granted.

Such a view commended itself to one of the most far-sighted of our teachers. Shortly before his death, Mrs Maurice says that she had read to her husband part of the third and fourth chapters of this Epistle, and had observed to him that "all the part about Noah and Christ's preaching to the spirits in hell was very difficult."—"He said it was, and asked for his Greek Testament. An hour or two later he said he thought he saw the meaning—that, as the ark saved the eight souls as a promise that all should be saved, so baptism saved those who were baptized, thus figuring God's salvation of all." (*Note II.*)

It is but right to say that there is a further suggested explanation. This is, that St Peter had in his mind a Jewish tradition which was preserved in the so-called "Book of Enoch"; and that the original text of the Epistle had made this quite

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clear until it was altered by the mistake of a copyist. (*Note 12.*)

Fragments of this book of Enoch have been discovered, containing many allusions to the deluge. They state moreover that Enoch was sent as a plenipotentiary to the fallen spirits by the watchers who formed the heavenly council; and it is to be noted that these spirits are described as shut up in prison. (*Note 13.*)

It must not be thought that this suggested restoration of the text would require us to suppose that St Peter intended to make no reference to our Lord's activity in the other world. On the contrary, his point would be that our Lord, in the interval before the resurrection, was engaged in doing on a much larger scale just what had been done long before in a particular instance.

We do not know what information St Peter may have had as his authority for his account of our Lord's Descent into Hades. It is perhaps significant that he would have found references in each of the two Epistles of St Paul, with which he was evidently acquainted, that might have turned his thoughts in that direction. In Rom. x. 7 there are the words, "Who shall descend into the abyss? (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead)": and in Eph. iv. 9 there is the statement: "This, he ascended, what is it but that he also descended into the lower parts of the earth": followed a little later on by "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall shine upon thee" (v. 14), words which in early times were interpreted as having been addressed to the departed. It is

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moreover important to remember that, in his speech as recorded in the Acts, St Peter had applied to our Lord the words of the Psalmist—"Thou wilt not leave my soul in Hades." (ii. 27.)

Whatever explanations we adopt, the message of St Peter is the same; and we cannot but recognise that it came most appropriately from one who had himself experienced the mercy that could search out and rescue the fallen; and might well rejoice to tell of a hope that would yet be the portion of those who had only too much reason to fear that they were for ever to be excluded from it. (*Note 14.*)

Certain it is that, so long as the world lasts, so long will the "vox Petri" be heard with gratitude as it tells of a hope that shines like a beacon-light from afar across the shadows and storms of our precarious existence.

Perhaps it is worth while to add that if at any time we desire to find a brief epitome of the Epistle, we cannot do better than call to mind one of the most popular of our favourite hymns. When next we join in singing the well-known lines:—

"Through the night of doubt and sorrow
Onward goes the pilgrim band,
Singing songs of expectation,
Marching to the promised land"

and the verses that follow, we may rightly reflect that they could never have been written had it not been for a memory, conscious or unconscious, of St Peter's words.

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NOTES

1. "This Epistle shares with 1 John the pre-eminence of being to all appearance universally accepted from the time when any book of the New Testament other than the Gospels and St Paul's Epistles had canonical authority."
—Dr Hort, *First Epistle of St Peter*, p. 1 note.

2. Dr Briggs, *Church Unity*, p. 203.

"Taking the Syriac versions as our guide, we may conclude that our Lord's words, spoken in Aramaic, ran thus: 'Thou art Cepha, and upon this Cepha I will build.'"—Bishop Chase, *Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible*, iii. 759.

It is interesting to learn that Abraham bore in Rabbinic literature the title of "the rock."

The following passage is quoted in confirmation of this:

"There was a king who desired to build and to lay foundations: he dug constantly deeper, but found only a swamp. At last he dug and found a *petra* (this is the very word the Rabbi uses). He said, 'On this spot I shall build and lay the foundations.' So the Holy One, blessed be he, desired to create the world, but meditating upon the generations of Enoch and the Deluge, he said, 'How shall I create the world whilst these wicked men will only provoke me?' But, as soon as God perceived that there would rise

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an Abraham, he said, 'Behold I have found the *petra* upon which to build and to lay foundations.' Therefore he called Abraham 'rock,' as it is said, 'Look unto the rock whence ye are hewn—Look unto Abraham your father.'"—Quoted by Bishop Chase from an article by Dr Schechter in the *Jewish Quarterly Review* of April 1900.

3. See Dr Hort's *Judaistic Christianity*, pp. 59 f.
4. That "Babylon" (v. 13) was a covert name for Rome was the view of the early Church. Such a metaphorical use was common among the Rabbis; it may well have been adopted here for prudential reasons.
5. This view of the co-operation of St Paul and St Peter is set forth with much clearness in the important articles by Bishop Chase on St Peter and this Epistle in *Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible*.
6. Commenting on the expression "strangers of dispersion" (i. 1), Dr Hort wrote: "The inference that the Christians addressed must have been Jewish Christians has an obvious plausibility. It is not supported however by the contents of the Epistle generally, nor is it an intrinsically probable interpretation." "The words point back to the Jewish Dispersion as a foreshadowing of the position of the Christian converts." "'You Christians of the Asiatic provinces are the strangers of the dispersion,' St Peter seems to say; making

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virtually the same claim as when St Paul said, 'We are the true circumcision' (Phil. iii. 3: cf. Rom. ii. 25-29; Eph. ii. 11)."

7. Dr Hort noted the "intimate dependence of 1 Peter on Romans and Ephesians," and went so far as to say that "the true key to not a few difficult passages of St Peter is to be found in tracing back the thought to those two Epistles of St Paul."—*First Epistle of St Peter*, p. 5, note.
8. Bishop Chase, *Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible*, iii. 782*b*.
9. Godet, *Biblical Studies*, p. 210.
10. "The First Epistle of St Peter is a letter of counsel and consolation, setting forth the Christian philosophy of pain. Three times is the main thesis repeated, viz., that to suffer patiently, when innocent, for conscience sake, is acceptable with God. This is to imitate the example of Christus Patiens."
"The writer suggests that suffering in the case of the righteous has a purifying and quickening power. It is God's judgment, and His judgments are always full of purpose. 'He that hath suffered in the flesh, hath ceased from sin' (iv. 1) is a bold statement of this truth that pain is God's discipline."—Dr J. H. Bernard, *Studia Sacra*, p. 21.
11. See *Life of F. D. Maurice*, ii. 639.
12. The conjecture as to the copyist's mistake is certainly ingenious. If we take the sentences

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in the form in which we are accustomed to read them—"being quickened in the spirit, in which also he went and preached to the spirits in prison"—and compare them with the original, we see that the words, "in which also," represent the three Greek words EN O KAI; or ENOKAI, as they would have been written in the early manuscripts. If we may suppose that these words had been followed by ENOCH, thus making the statement to read—"in which also Enoch went and preached," it is not hard to see how easily the name of Enoch might have been dropped out by a transcriber.

This conjecture was made by Dr Rendel Harris. It has to be allowed that there is no direct manuscript or patristic evidence that can be adduced in its support; but, on the other hand, it is remarkable that these particular statements of St Peter do not appear to have been quoted by any early writer until after the second century, in spite of the fact that "no subject had a greater fascination for the early Christian mind than the Descent of Christ into Hades and the 'Harrowing of Hell.'"—Dr Armitage Robinson, *The Gospel according to Peter*, p. 25.

It does look therefore as if the original text may not have been exactly that with which we are now familiar.

13. 1 Enoch xii. 3; x. 13.

14. "These passages of St Peter are of extreme value. They attest the achievement of the

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first stage in the moralisation of Sheol. According to the Judaistic conception, souls in Sheol were conceived as insusceptible of ethical progress. What they were on entering Sheol, that they continued to be till the final judgment. From the standpoint of a true theism can we avoid pronouncing this conception mechanical and unethical? It precludes moral change in moral beings who are under the rule of a perfectly moral Being.”—R. H. Charles, Art. “Eschatology,” *Encyclopædia Biblica*, ii. 1381.

VII

THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

LOOKING UP AND KEEPING ON

WE do not know who the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews was; but we do know that he was a man of much thought, and rare insight, who could express his convictions with great lucidity and astonishing boldness.

Our aim in these studies has been to make clear that the New Testament writings, like all inspired utterances, have a message which does not pass away but may acquire increasing force as the years go by. We need not fear that this Epistle will prove any exception to the rule.

"Every student of the Epistle to the Hebrews," Bishop Westcott did not hesitate to say, "must feel that it deals in a peculiar degree with the thoughts of our own time": and, speaking for himself, he went on to make this striking acknowledgment: "No work on which I have ever been allowed to spend many years of continuous labour has had for me the same intense human interest as the study of the Epistle to the Hebrews." (*Note 1.*) We may be sure that the Bishop, if he were with us to-day and were faced by our problems, would speak with no less strength of conviction and enthusiasm.

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Evidently, then, we must approach the consideration of the Epistle with high expectation. It may be allowed that, at first sight, the circumstances of those to whom it was originally addressed appear to have been very different from our own; and that, at first hearing, the arguments which were employed sound to us archaic and unattractive. But on closer acquaintance we shall discover that, as a matter of fact, the old conditions bear so striking a resemblance to our own, that it is well worth our while to learn what were the counsels given as to the best ways of dealing with them.

We had better begin, as we have generally begun, by trying to visualise the situation which led to the writing of the Epistle. We may accept the view that it was addressed to Hebrew Christians in Palestine (*Note 2*); and, as no hint was given of the destruction of Jerusalem, we may conclude that it was written before the year A.D. 70. That was a time of great anxiety, in which there was a widespread sense that some vast revolutionary change was impending. The Hebrew Christians more especially were in a state of perplexity. They had attached themselves to the Gospel without thereby abandoning their reverence for the Law. The difficulties of their position would not have been apparent at once. But the time had come when it looked as if a choice would have to be made, and a more definite line adopted. They were being forced to come to a decision as to the side of the compromise to which they were to incline.

All had seemed to go fairly well so long as their new enthusiasm had been strong; but in the course

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of years much of its freshness had worn off, and misgivings had begun to arise.

The Zealots around them were out and out defenders of that which had been; and they themselves were disposed by something more than patriotism to look with regret upon the old order that was in danger of vanishing away.

The lure of the past was great, while the prospect of the future was becoming more vague and uncertain. Little wonder if they were hesitating and weak-kneed, and had hardly the heart so much as to face one another. As a consequence they were beginning to fall away from attendance at the gatherings in which in happier days they had been wont to confess their faith and strengthen their fellowship.

Happily, with the need, there came the provision to meet it. Happily also we still possess the words of wise counsel and serious expostulation which the writer of the Epistle was prompted to send to his comrades. We must try to grasp as clearly as we may their meaning and purpose.

The first thing to note is that, like a true teacher, he started from that most certain of all facts, the fact of God. He would have his readers remember how the Higher Wisdom had guided their fathers in order that they themselves might be prepared to believe that for them also a way was appointed on which they were to find their discipline and perfecting. Only with this assurance could they rightly approach their difficulties and hope to be relieved from their perplexities.

And what of the course that he would advise

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them to follow? Did he tell them that they ought not to look back? That he certainly did not do. The greater part of his letter was occupied with the story of the past. He did not say that they were doing wrong by thinking of what had been; what he was anxious to impress upon them was that there was one thing they must bear in mind if their study of the past was to be really profitable. They would do well to look back, but only upon this condition, that they looked *back far enough*.

We shall not understand the Epistle unless we keep this stipulation in mind. In no other way can we explain the silence of the writer with regard to the Temple and its ceremonies. It may have been that he was disposed to regard the Temple of Herod, and possibly that of Solomon also, as dubious developments which had been unduly influenced by conformity to secular standards. At all events, he made it plain that he desired his readers to carry their thoughts much farther back, to that which could claim to have been more directly God-given. Accordingly he bade them recall the memories of the Tabernacle of the earliest days. This for him was the authorised copy of the pattern on the Mount. (*Note 3.*) Nor is he content that they should stay even there. He points them farther still, beyond and behind Moses and Aaron, back to Abraham; and to an even remoter figure, almost lost in the mist of the ages, back to Melchisedec. To him Abraham had paid tithes; thereby symbolically admitting that he stood for an order of priesthood more august and more universal than the Levitical. In him was revealed the mysterious figure of a royal

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priest, king of righteousness and king of peace; the prototype and prophecy of a priesthood which was to be personal and not transmissible; eternal, as having neither beginning nor end of days.

The large amount of space which he devoted to the worship and ceremonies of the Levitical law precludes the idea that the author was lacking in a proper respect for its teaching and ritual. We are not to suppose that he questioned whether it had been divinely permitted and sanctioned; though he was clearly convinced that it was only intended to mark a transitional stage, and that in many respects temporary concessions had been made to the weakness of those for whose education it was provided.

Provisional as the Jewish system was intended to be, it stood for certain great elementary principles which it was its special function and lasting service to proclaim. These unforgettable principles have been well summed up as the following: that "the destiny of humanity is the attainment of likeness to God"; that "man as he is cannot at his own pleasure, or in his own right, draw nigh to God"; and that "it was the good pleasure of God to enter into Covenant with man." (*Note 4.*)

It was made plain in the Epistle that what was thus fundamentally true in the older dispensation was to be retained and treated with the utmost respect; but it was no less insistently urged that there could be no real reverence in refusing to be led on to the higher revelation for which the past was intended to prepare. Its types and symbols were shadows cast beforehand of coming events. What they prefigured had in large measure actually

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happened. And more was to follow. All that was most precious in Jewish religion had received, or was about to receive, its fullest expression and perfect consummation in Christ. His ministry, of which the beginnings were on earth, was now being exercised in heaven.

While therefore it was right to look back, it was vastly more necessary that they should look up. Far above this earthly sphere they should fix the eyes of their minds upon the heavenly vision; a vision, it had to be remembered, not of Divinity only, but of Divinity inseparably linked with Humanity. The exalted Christ, "Jesus the Son of God," is the final revelation of reality. He is the way of living access to the Father. He is the true High Priest. Having completed His sacrifice for sins, He now appears on man's behalf in the Temple not made with hands. He will communicate the virtue of His life to those who come to God through Him. He is inseparably one with us His brethren. In Him we may confidently recognise the anticipation of our destiny. It is true that we see not yet all things as they will one day be; our abiding consolation is that "we see Jesus crowned with glory and honour."

It is the duty, therefore, as it is the privilege, of Christians to be "looking unto Jesus." This is the attitude of faith, the reckoning that the invisible is more real than the visible; faith which is "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

Regret for the past would be softened, would indeed give place to quite other feelings, if they

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could realise how present and actual their interests were in the heavenly possession. "Ye are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the City of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable hosts of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant." Let them above all else have faith, and lift up their hearts to the Lord.

There was yet another thing that was required from them. In addition to faith they must also have patience. Everything could not be brought to pass in a moment. The fulness of spiritual attainment could only come by degrees. Life was a discipline, and its joy was in learning. They must follow on if they were to know. No failure was so irretrievably fatal as the refusal to persevere.

This, as they ought to understand, was no new requirement. It had never been otherwise, whatever picture they might have drawn for themselves of the good old times. Let them remember the "forty years in the wilderness"; just as many years, so it happened, since most of them had first become Christians. They must not forget that the majority of the Israelites had failed to pass through their trial, and had therefore not been permitted to enter the promised land.

In short, they must **KEEP ON**. They must strengthen one another, and hold fast the things they had learned. It would never do to forsake the gatherings of the faithful. They must take

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their part in the Eucharistic sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. And they must be careful not to neglect the old duties of honesty and purity, of kindness and hospitality. They ought not to grow weary in well-doing. Above all they must settle it in their minds that there could be no turning back.

The only possible watchword was "Forward." They must be ready to leave the things which were behind, and "go on unto perfection." (*Note 5.*)

It remains now to consider upon what grounds we are justified in saying that the counsels given in the Epistle are specially applicable to ourselves and our conditions to-day.

We cannot of course suppose that our circumstances and experiences are as critical and difficult as were those of the Hebrew Christians. Happily, they are not. And yet there are points of similarity which become clearer as we look into them.

We too have been learning by painful experience what it is to be involved in a world-shaking crisis. The four years of our great war were virtually equivalent to the life of a generation: and that is why we are feeling the bewilderment of those who have to face problems that have been unexpectedly forced upon them. We are often warned that we are standing on the threshold of a new age, and it is evident that we must expect to see great changes in the social fabric and in the long-established order.

Nor can there be any doubt that among the things that are shaken must be included some of the inherited forms of traditional morality and institutional religion. The result is an increasing

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feeling of uncertainty in many quarters. It is this that has been largely responsible for the falling off of attendances at the services of the Churches, as well as for a general impression of the unsatisfactoriness of much of our present Christianity.

We ought not therefore to be surprised if voices should be heard urging that the only path of safety is to be found in a backward movement to some one or other of the systems of the fixed belief and regular method of former days. Distance lends enchantment, and it is not altogether strange that the sincere convictions and efficient institutions of a bygone age should make a powerful appeal to minds that are perturbed and distressed by the starting of difficult questions, and the threatened removal of landmarks and safeguards.

Perhaps, too, we may trace a likeness between ourselves and those vacillating Jewish Christians in our temperamental inclination to have it both ways if this may be. We are constitutionally disposed to take an intermediate line. We prefer, if we can, to maintain a hold upon the past while at the same time we profess a willingness to go on, somewhat timidly it may be, to the future.

Where then are we to turn for counsel and direction? Are we to try to put the clock back? Is it a right thing to make strenuous efforts to recreate the atmosphere and re-establish the procedure of some one or other of the generations behind us? Or would it be wiser to conclude that, while it is our duty to think most reverently of our Divinely guided history, and to let none of its lessons slip from us unappropriated, yet nevertheless we are bound to

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recognise that there are stronger claims upon our allegiance than those which bind us to the past?

Can we really do better than follow the advice that was given in the Epistle to the Hebrews? We need, no doubt, to translate it into the terms that are most intelligible to the mind of our own age; but in the main the old precepts will serve.

It is not wrong to look back, if only we remember that the farther back we go for enlightenment and inspiration, the more likely we shall be to reach the sources that are most full of quickening power. But we must make up our minds that our Christian discipleship demands from us more than any loyalty to the past. When much is being shaken, our strength is to remember that realities remain unaffected. There are the things which eternally abide, since no change that happens can ever deprive us of our right to rely wholly upon Him who is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever."

We may be assured that the light which has guided us so far will continue to guide us in the future. The best is yet to be. There are stores of knowledge that have still to be opened. And there are experiences before us that will equal or surpass any that have already been. No doubt we shall have trials and conflicts. These will be needed as tests of endurance, and will bring us fresh revelations of strength. It is only "through faith and patience"—looking up, and keeping on—that we can ever hope to inherit the promises.

Among the delightful stories that have come from the Mission Field, there is one of a native convert

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who unexpectedly announced that he had made an English hymn. Knowing the man's knowledge of the English language to be very small, the missionary was naturally curious to hear what the hymn was like. It ran thus:

“ Go on, go on, go on, go on,
Go on, go on, go on ;
Go on, go on, go on, go on,
Go on, go on, go on.”

Four lines went to a verse, and the number of verses was unlimited. There was this further advantage, that they could be sung to any Common Measure tune!

Would that all our hymns were as wholesome in their teaching, and as much beyond reproach in their practical tendency. Certainly no words could express more correctly, or indeed more literally, the advice that the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews was anxious to leave permanently impressed upon the consciences and hearts of his readers.

One thing more may be added. If the account we have given of the purpose of the Epistle is correct, we should not expect to find in it anticipations of uses and practices which in the course of time were to be developed in the Christian Church. It is more than probable that the writer had no thought that any long interval would elapse before the Lord's return; and that he would have been surprised if he could have foreseen how far history was to repeat itself in the provision that would have to be made in the way of ritual arrangements to

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maintain the unity and discipline of the Church, and to provide for the due performance of its worship, and the gradual education of its members.

We can believe that he would have recognised in such developments the promised guidance and direction of the Spirit of Christ. But we shall do him no injustice if we say that, with his marked preference for the mystical as distinguished from the systematic and the institutional, he would have regarded these arrangements as of, at the most, secondary importance, and would have been as anxious as ever to urge the necessity of keeping in close touch with the high ideal and simple life of the earliest days.

He would have felt, we may be sure, the need of guarding against any obscuring of the right of direct access to God, which is the distinctively Christian privilege; and he would have bidden us see to it that structural organisations should never become so inflexibly fixed as to discourage thought, and to make progress impossible. (*Note 6.*)

NOTES

1. Bishop Westcott, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, pp. v, ix.
2. "In spite of the difficulties suggested by the language of some individual verses, it seems to me morally impossible that the circumstances of the Jewish Christians addressed were the circumstances of any part of the Dispersion: in other words the greater part of the Epistle

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would have been, as far as our knowledge goes, beside the mark if written to any region but Jerusalem and Judea.”—Dr Hort, *Judaistic Christianity*, p. 156.

3. “The Temple, no less than the kingdom, with which it corresponded, was the sign of a spiritual declension. Both were endeavours to give a fixed and permanent shape, according to the conditions of earthly life, to ideas which in their essential nature led the thoughts of men forward to the future and the unseen.” “The divine interpreter of the Old Testament necessarily looked beyond the splendours of the sacred buildings (Matt. xxiv. 1 ff.), and the triumphs of the monarchy of David, to the sacred tent of the pilgrim people and the heavenly sovereignty.”—Bishop Westcott, *Hebrews*, p. 233.
4. Bishop Westcott, *op. cit.*, p. lv.
5. “The writer calls upon his readers to make their choice boldly. Judaism was becoming, if it had not already become, anti-Christian. It must be given up (xiii. 13). It was ‘near vanishing away’ (viii. 13). It was no longer debated whether a Gentile Church should stand beside the Jewish Church, as in the first period of conflict in the Apostolic age: or whether a Jewish Church should stand beside the Gentile Church, as in the next period. The Christian Church must be one and independent. And thus the Epistle is a

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monument of the last crisis of conflict out of which the Catholic Church rose.”—Bishop Westcott, *op. cit.*, p. lviii.

6. “The outward ritual, the earthly kingdom, suggested hopes which they could not satisfy. So perhaps it is still. At least the words of the Psalmist, as they fall on our ears every morning, have an application which is never exhausted: ‘To-day, if ye will hear his voice.’ As yet we do not see the end.”—Concluding words of Dr Westcott’s Commentary.

VIII

THE FIRST EPISTLE OF ST JOHN

ERRORS TO BE GUARDED AGAINST

It is most fitting that we should take this as our final Epistle. In it we have the latest phase of the Apostolic teaching. Without doubt it was written by the author of the Fourth Gospel, and there is much to be said for regarding it as a postscript to that work. For reasons which were stated at some length in a former volume, *The Christ of the Gospels*, it will be assumed here that there is no sufficient cause to abandon the view, which for long was unanimously accepted, that the writer was John the son of Zebedee; though the account that is to be given of the contents of the Epistle might in substance remain unaltered if it could be proved that it was the work of a very early teacher, some other remarkable and venerable man.

Passing then to the Epistle itself, the first thing we must say is that it is no easy thing to gain a clear idea of its precise purpose and exact plan of procedure. Those who have attempted the task have found it more difficult than they supposed it would be when they began.

The number of the words employed is singularly

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small, and they are of the simplest kind. The author is never afraid of repeating himself, and is obviously anxious to make his meaning plain. None the less it is true to say that most readers have the feeling before long that they are becoming involved in a maze, and begin to wonder whether they will ever succeed in finding the clue. Various schemes of analysis have been proposed, but, if the truth must be told, they are too subtle and elaborate to be very convincing or helpful.

What then are we to do? Is it overbold to imagine the sort of things the writer himself might say if we could show him our attempts to get at his meaning, and could ask him to give us some hint of his intention and design?

Can we not conceive that his reply might be something of this kind? "I do not know that I was writing with any very definite plan in my mind; but I can tell you what it was I was most concerned about at the time that I wrote. It was a time when great dangers were threatening the Church. Novel and mischievous opinions were being circulated and discussed. Things had been taught that seemed to be plausible, but were utterly subversive of the truth. These things could not be allowed to go unrebuked. So I felt that I had to point out the errors, and to show what it was that was unchristian and false. That is why I wrote as I did."

Shall we try, then, to understand what the errors were, and see how they were combated?

The errors had sprung up in Asia Minor, the great meeting-place of East and West. This, as we

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have already had occasion to remark, was a hotbed in which all sorts of extravagant growths flourished abundantly. It had produced the strangest combinations of philosophy and so-called "gnosis," knowledge or science, with mysticism and spiritism. Advocates of new thought had appeared within the Christian communities, and had been accepted as persons of superior intelligence and exceptional insight. Their influence had been largely due to the fact that what they offered was something less commonplace and more exciting than the familiar message of the Church and the beliefs of the ordinary Christian. Of these beliefs they spoke disparagingly, as they did also of the regular authorities.

It was not until later that the tendencies of such teachings became unmistakably manifest, but even the earlier stages were full of danger. As one who has made a special study of the period has said: "Christianity has never passed, humanly speaking, through any other crisis of such utter peril." (*Note 1.*)

Mercifully the Church was warned and prepared by the spiritual foresight of an aged messenger, steward, and watchman, who had lingered long at his post, and had noted with alarm the first beginnings of the mischief.

There is good ground for the supposition that it was he who established the order of Episcopacy in Asia Minor, and thereby made provision for an authorised continuity of responsible witnesses, in an unbroken line from Christ and His Apostles, to act as a safeguard against the claims of a secret succession of unaccredited teachers. (*Note 2.*)

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But St John was determined, in addition to this precautionary policy, to bear his own personal testimony to the truth of the original message, and to make it evident wherein that differed from subsequent misrepresentations.

As he viewed the matter, the very essentials of Christianity were at stake. It was a question of light and darkness, life and death. The difference was between the revelation of the true God, and the superstition and gloom of paganism. How strongly he felt this can be seen by the startling words of his final expostulation: "guard yourselves from idols."

When we inquire what in particular the fatal errors were, we are led to the conclusion that they were three.

The first was a *defective representation of the Person of Christ*. The Apostle was determined that there should be no ambiguity or uncertain sound in his own testimony as to the reality of the Incarnation. We know well the emphatic and reiterated assertion with which the Epistle opens: "That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we beheld, and our hands handled, concerning the Word of life (and the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare unto you the life, the eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us); that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you."

The same note of confidence occurs again and again in the Epistle, until near its close we have the

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statement, irresistible by reason of its very simplicity: "We know that the Son of God is come."

It was the unwillingness of the new teachers to acknowledge what is involved in this fundamental fact that made it of the first importance to warn the faithful against them.

There are two forms that opposition to the true doctrine of the Incarnation may take. One is Contradiction; the other is Compromise. That is to say, the whole story may be dismissed as a fiction; or the fact may be admitted, while the interpretation is changed.

It was the line of compromise that these teachers had adopted. They stumbled at the thought of our Lord growing up through the weakness of childhood, and enduring the disgrace of a death by crucifixion. To them it was inconceivable that a Divine Being could be permanently associated with a nature such as that of ordinary mortals. Accordingly they maintained that His humanity was only an appearance, and His wearing it only a temporary expedient.

The human Jesus, so they declared, had received the heavenly endowment of the indwelling Christ at his baptism; and they had no difficulty, as they imagined, in showing that he himself had admitted that this Power had forsaken him before he died on the Cross.

There have been other attempts to explain away the fact of the Incarnation. This was the earliest, and in some ways the strangest of all. We cannot be surprised that St John would have none of it. He left his readers in no kind of uncertainty as to

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his meaning. "Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ?" And again, "Hereby we know the Spirit of God; every spirit which confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit which confesseth not"—or (as there is some authority for rendering it) which annulleth—"Jesus, is not of God." (*Note 3.*)

May it not have been that it was his determination to exclude all attempts to read new interpretations into the records of what happened at the Jordan and on Calvary which led him to say, in words that have seemed hard to explain: "This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood"?

For St John all that was most vital to the Christian's well-being was involved in the whole-hearted recognition of the truth of the Person of Christ. He would have no one suppose for a moment that the doctrine of the Fatherhood of God could be maintained if that truth were not fully accepted; for "whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father."

So, again, if our Lord's assumption of human nature was anything less than a reality, there could be no abiding fellowship established between God and man; no assurance of propitiation made for sin; no certainty of a new birth; no pledge of victory for humanity; and no hope that "we shall be like him" when "we shall see him as he is."

For St John the truth revealed through the Incarnation was the light of all our seeing. "The Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding that we may know." For him (though he

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might not employ the precise phraseology used later by the Ecclesiastical Councils), a true belief in the fact of the Incarnation necessitated the acknowledgment of a permanent union of the perfectly Divine and the perfectly human, in the one Lord Jesus Christ.

Men might think him intolerant but, as he saw it, he had no alternative but to denounce in the most unsparing terms all who presumed to teach any other doctrine, as agents who were doing the work of anti-Christ. (*Note 4.*)

The next error in regard to which St John saw it to be necessary to put Christians on their guard was *a tendency to minimise*, if not entirely to ignore, *the fact of sin*. While he knew, of course, that a true theology does not start from sin as its foundation, he knew also that there can be no true or healthy religious teaching in which the guilt and misery of sin are made light of. We have only to glance over the contents of the Epistle to perceive the large place that is given to the need of right thinking and right dealing in the matter of sin.

It will be enough to remind ourselves of some of the representative passages.

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins.”

“If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar.”

“If any man sin we have an Advocate with the

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Father." "He is the propitiation for our sins."
"I write unto you, my little children, because your sins are forgiven you."

"He was manifested to take away sins." "He that doeth sin is of the devil." "Whosoever is begotten of God doeth no sin."

"If any man see his brother sinning a sin not unto death." "There is a sin unto death."

As a matter of fact, the word "sin," either as a noun or a verb, is found no less than twenty-seven times in the five chapters of the Epistle.

It is important to understand what exactly it was that the teachers of the new theology maintained. They did not deny that evil existed in the world. On the contrary they held that the world was irretrievably evil. But for them the evil was material and not moral; that is to say, it was necessarily immanent in matter, and was not to be traced to an attitude of will. Consequently it was not a thing for which man was responsible. In other words, they recognised the fact of evil; but they denied, or explained away, the fact of sin.

St John was far from being blind to the existence of evil in the world. He knew that "the world lieth in wickedness," or (as the R.V. translates it) "in the evil one." But he knew also that the worst of the mischief is within, and that it is wholly untrue to say that men are not responsible for it.

He knew too that this responsibility cannot be measured by what has always been the popular estimate of it. As in the Bible generally, so in the Epistle, sin is not merely a doing of wrong in this or the other particular. It consists far more in

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what is left undone; in the failure to rise to opportunities, and to reach the ideal. (*Note 5.*)

Much of the shallowness of the ordinary estimate of sin has been due to the lack of the sense that sins of commission are not to be compared, for seriousness and extent, with sins of omission. It is by what men do not do, by their refusals and shortcomings, that their characters must chiefly be judged.

The guilt of sin must be confessed, and the need for deliverance from it must be acknowledged, before there can be any certain assurance of forgiveness, and any conscious experience of regenerating grace.

Because this is so, St John felt compelled to insist that there can be no right understanding of religion where the evil of sin is ignored. A system which had no place for sin, as sin, had no claim to be regarded as Christian. (*Note 6.*)

There was yet a third danger with regard to which St John felt that he must unburden and deliver his soul. It was a danger that besets all intellectual persons, and most of all those who are continually occupied with theological pursuits; the danger of *exalting knowledge at the expense*, and it may be to the exclusion, *of love*.

"Gnostics" were so named because they made everything of *gnosis*, knowledge. For ordinary Christians, who did not possess this knowledge, they had a contempt which they were at no pains to conceal. And already this temper had begun to be manifested.

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St John was no enemy to knowledge. He was very far from being an obscurantist. He had much to tell about "light" and "truth." But he was keenly alive to the perils of self-deception. It was so plausible to argue that the contemplation of the Divine must necessarily cause all human achievement to appear coarse and unlovely. But to entertain such a doctrine is to contradict all that is most fundamental in the example and teaching of Christ. Christianity is bound up with the principle that he only can love God who loves his brother also. The demand is based upon that which is essentially reasonable, for "whosoever loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of him." St John therefore again spoke out in no uncertain tones :

"He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him." "He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in the darkness." "He that loveth not knoweth not God."

For St John a loveless knowledge was worse than unprofitable. It was a snare and a delusion. Just because he prized the true knowledge, he could not abide the pretensions of the false. He had no use for a theology that was divorced from love. Against this specious claim to knowledge, therefore, he launched his final condemnation; thereby reminding us that, though he was indeed the Apostle of love, he had not ceased to be able to show himself as a "son of thunder" when occasion required.

Not that we can think rightly of him if we imagine that he was only or mainly occupied with denunciations. If he felt it necessary to protest, it was

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because he was deeply concerned to defend positive truths.

What these truths were, was made plain beyond the possibility of mistake; and the more we consider them, the more we must be convinced that they represent the indispensable notes of a vital Christianity.

According to St John, and in this he did not differ from other writers of the New Testament, a true Christian is to be known as one who is possessed by lofty, and lowly, and loving thoughts: *lofty* thoughts of the Person of the Incarnate Lord; *lowly* thoughts of his own achievements and deservings; and *loving* thoughts of all men, specially of those who are of the household of faith. (Note 7.)

We may be well content to take this as the ultimate message of the Christianity of the Epistles.

NOTES

1. Prof. C. H. Turner, *Early History of the Church and Ministry*, p. 99.
2. "To the dissensions of Jew and Gentile converts, and to the disputes of Gnostic false teachers, the development of Episcopacy may be mainly ascribed."

"Asia Minor was the nurse, if not the mother, of Episcopacy in the Gentile Churches. So important an institution, developed in a Christian community of which St John was the living centre and guide, could hardly have grown up without his sanction."

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“When, after the fall of the city, St John with other surviving Apostles removed to Asia Minor and found there manifold irregularities and threatening symptoms of disruption, he would not unnaturally encourage an approach in these Gentile Churches to the same organisation which had been signally blessed, and proved effectual in holding together the mother Church amid dangers not less serious.”—Bishop Lightfoot, “Essay on the Christian Ministry,” *Philippians*, pp. 204 f.

“I do not know that history has more to tell us than Lightfoot has presented in a summary form with his characteristic accuracy, perspicuity and vigour.”—Dr J. Armitage Robinson, *Early History of the Church and Ministry*, p. 87.

3. “A very ancient reading,” *qui solvit Jesum*, occurs in all Latin manuscripts but one. According to Bishop Westcott, “it seems likely” that St John used both phrases, and that the second “was transferred to this context from some traditional saying” of the Apostle “in which it was applied to false teachers.”—*Epistles of St John*, pp. 135, 156.
4. “Christianity stands or falls by its Founder’s claim to be divine as well as human, and the more profoundly natural for being something more than natural in the narrow sense. You may accept that claim or you may reject it; but you cannot compromise it.”

“The Christian doctrine of the Person of

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Christ can be stated simply enough—that He is as divine as the Father, and as human as ourselves. This is the sum total of Christian orthodoxy on the matter, and anyone who means this means all that St Athanasius ever meant.”—Gwatkin, *Knowledge of God*, i. p. 246; ii. p. 112.

5. It is noteworthy that St John gives two definitions of sin, and that each of them is negative —“sin is lawlessness (*anomia*)”; “sin is unrighteousness (*adikia*).”
6. A much-needed protest was made in Dr M. G. Glazebrook’s *Faith of a Modern Churchman* (second edition, 1925, p. 25) against “the error” which praises as “healthy minded” those “who are content to turn away from a past course of evil and forget all about it, saying that regrets are vain”; and the “still more fatal error of ‘the modern man’ who ‘does not worry at all about sin.’” “He can deny the importance of sin only if he denies that sin separates him from God: and that means that there is no tie of kinship such as sin must break. In other words, he repudiates the spiritual heritage which gives value to his own being.”
7. In a remarkable article written some years ago, Sir James Fitzjames Stephen frankly faced the possibility that Christian belief might one day be abandoned, and gave his deliberate opinion as to the consequences that might be expected

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to follow. He recounted many of the sentiments and qualities that would be likely to remain unaffected by the change, "Love, friendship, good-nature, kindness carried to the height of sincere and devoted affection will always be the chief pleasures of life, whether Christianity be true or false; but Christian Charity is not the same as any of these, or all of them put together, and I think if Christian Theology were exploded, Christian Charity would not long survive it."—*Nineteenth Century*, Jan. 1884.

